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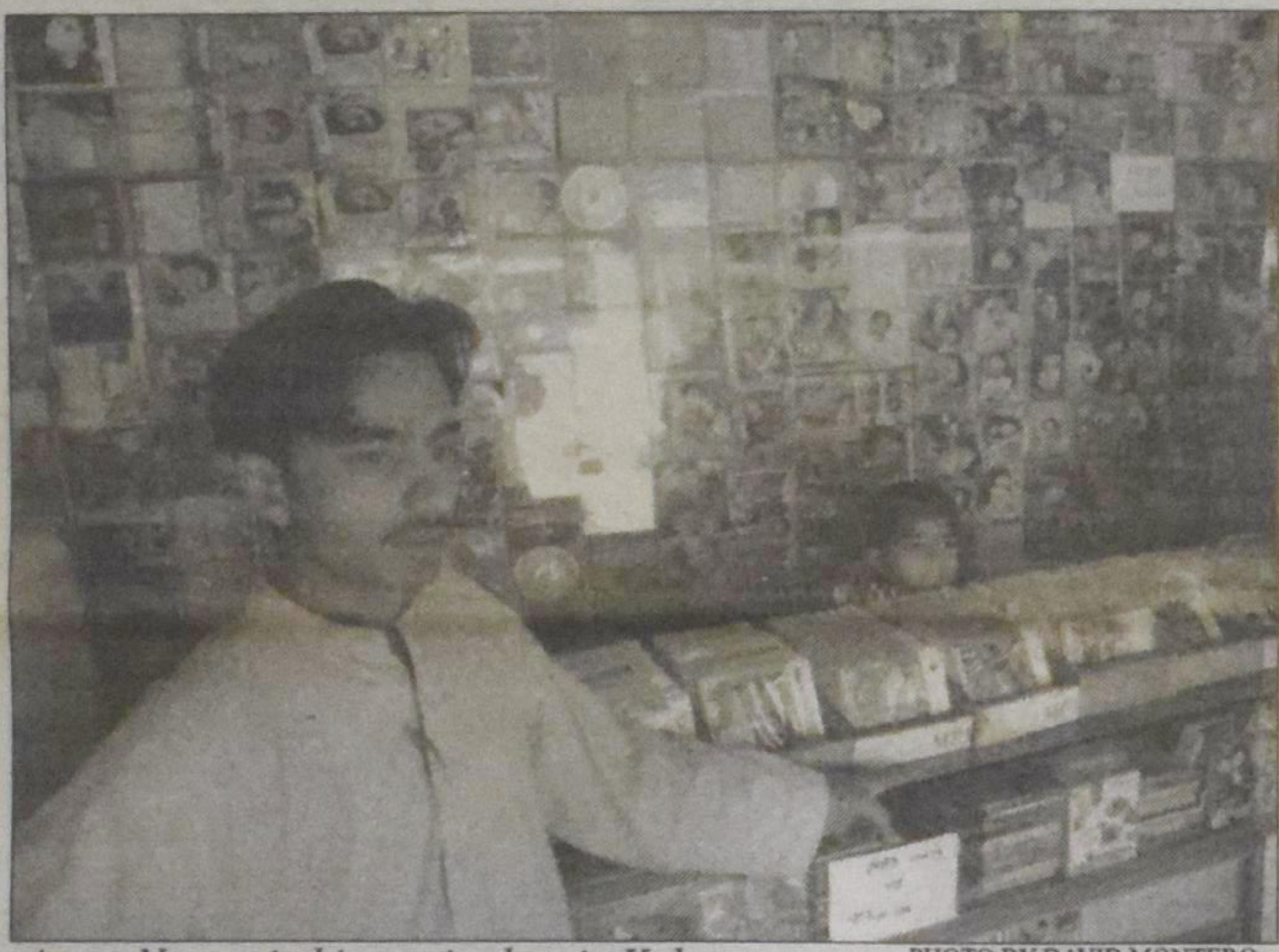
Pakistan losing territory to radicals

David Montero



Ansar Naeem in his music shop in Kohat, near Pakistan's tribal belt, which was bombed last month because Taliban sympathisizers say it is a sin to sell music and western movies. PHOTO BY DAVID MONTERO

SWAT, Pakistan – In this valley of orchards near Afghanistan, 90 police hid along the banks of a riverbed in March, preparing to arrest the powerful Pakistani cleric Maualana Fazlullah. Informants said the target, charged with terrorism, would soon appear with a modest contingent of followers. Instead, Mr. Fazlullah rode into sight on a white horse, surrounded by hundreds of people.

When the officers advanced, brandishing tear gas and batons, word flew through the town. Thousands more supporters turned out to further protect Fazlullah. The officers backed off in an incident that shocked the country, exposing as it did the state's powerlessness to apprehend a wanted terrorist.

Such scenes are common in the tribal agencies of Waziristan, where the Taliban hold sway under a controversial truce signed with the government in September. But Swat is not Waziristan: It rests squarely in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), a government-administered area long considered beyond such lawlessness.

The rise of Fazlullah exposes the economic and political failures fanning extremism even in these areas, and hints at the consequences, both for Pakistan and the international community, if the province continues down a path of deprivation. Allow him to persist, many observers say, and others will be emboldened to roll back the state's policies of moderation – small but symbolically important gains in women's empowerment, girls' education, and religious tolerance.

"My opinion is, if you take him out today, there will be a reaction," says Asfandiar Amir Zeb, a former mayor of the district of Swat. "Leave it for a month, there will be a bigger reaction. If you leave it for six months, you won't be able to catch him."

Many observers insist that, if the government openly supports a movement against Fazlullah, ordinary citizens will take up the call. Liberal forces abound throughout Pakistan's frontier with Afghanistan, but they lack leadership and support from the central government.

"The majority of people are liberal. But there is no institution for the liberals. The government schools, to some extent, but they are very [few]," says Wajid Ali Khan, a former member of the provincial assembly from the Awami National Party.

Fazlullah signals a dangerous tipping point: He is the local leader of Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammad (TNSM, or The Movement for the Enforcement of Islamic Laws), an armed militia that fought in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban. Police say he commands thousands of followers, is stockpiling weapons, and has growing links to Al Qaeda – all of which could turn the area into another terrorist haven. The urgency of the issue was underlined in April, when a British court sentenced five suspects to life for plotting attacks in Britain. Many of those sentenced received jihad training in Malakand, a district adjacent to Fazlullah's.

Many are poor

From the vantage of the cosmopolitan capital, Islamabad, Pakistan is one of the most rapidly growing economies in Asia. But Swat, home to 1.5 million, is a reminder that the frontier has long been deprived of that wealth. The gradual death of an agrarian way of life in Swat, following increased mechanization and a series of land reforms that undercut sharecropping, has promoted the wealth of a few at the expense of thousands. With little local industry, residents of Swat have some of the lowest incomes per day in the province, a formula for discontent.

Local officials in Swat complain they haven't received development funds from the federal government in more than two years. "If I had money, I would give [the city] a vision for development. But I don't have any money," says a frustrated Jamal Nasir Khan, a mayor of Swat based in Saidu Sharif, the district capital. Mr. Khan says he'd like to build more schools and health facilities for the area's population, 49 percent of whom live below the poverty line and 61 percent of whom are illiterate.

It is a problem repeated throughout the NWFP. "Since 1977, there has been no attempt at regional equality," says Karachi-based economist Kaiser Bengali.

Although NWFP has some of the highest rates of poverty, illiteracy, and violence in Pakistan, it received just $34 million in federal aid and development grants in 2006, compared with Punjab's

See **Pakistan** *on p. 2*

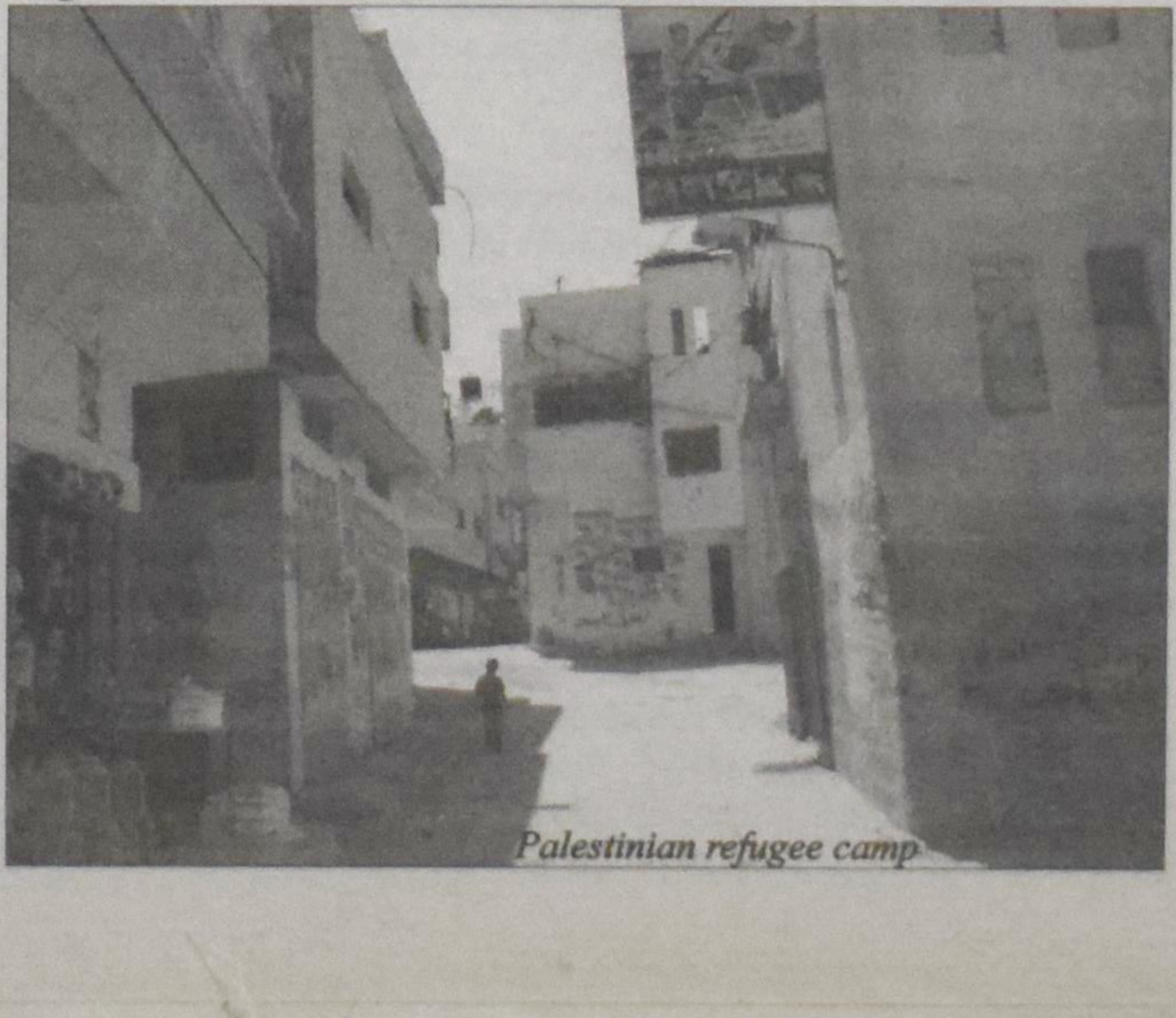
Lebanon is once again battered by violence

Harry der Nederlanden

Lebanon is once again suffering from the turmoil and divisions that terrorize the Middle East. The country long served as a meeting place for East and West, providing greater mutual freedoms than most countries in the region. Many of its troubles began in 1948 with the founding of the state of Israel and the planting of Palestinian refugee camps within its borders.

The present round of fighting was sparked by a bank robbery staged by a radical Islamic group – Fatah al-Islam, which aligns itself with Al Qaeda. Recently

See **Lebanon** *on p. 3*



Palestinian refugee camp

News

Moderate voices from a Pakistani city

David Montero

Kohat, Pakistan – At the end of March, extremists blew a shutter off Ansar Naeem's small shop just outside Pakistan's tribal belt, which sells music Cds and movies – considered a sin by the Taliban and their supporters.

But Mr. Naeem doesn't heed the message of bombs. In a silent but powerful rebuke, he opened his shop right back up again. "I cannot abandon my business because of that," says Naeem. "I'm not scared."

Even as a wave of such attacks ripples across Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan, leaving dozens of music and video stores in ashes, customers are sending their own messages of defiance. On a recent afternoon, there were more of them than could fit in Naeem's tiny shop. And police, who quickly rounded up the culprits, say the attacks are fostering greater civilian policing.

On a larger level, the fate of Naeem's shop seems inextricably linked with that of Pakistan itself: While Taliban-linked violence expands in areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) like Swat – where a paucity of earning potential and education has given rise to powerful extremist clerics like Maulana Fazlullah – so too are pockets of civilian resistance like Kohat, a model district to Swat's south.

Only increased civic engagement, propelled by the broad and moderate middle class, can turn the rising tide of Islamic extremism, many observers say. But because the administration of President Pervez Musharraf often fails to support these democratic forces, many are concerned that liberal voices will remain a silent majority.

Wajid Ali Khan, a politician in Swat, which borders Pakistan's tribal belt, is concerned about the growing power of a local extremist leader, Maulana Fazlullah. Khan, like others, believes that liberal forces in his area outnumber extremists, but that they need more support from the government to act as a bulwark in an area where schools and jobs are few.

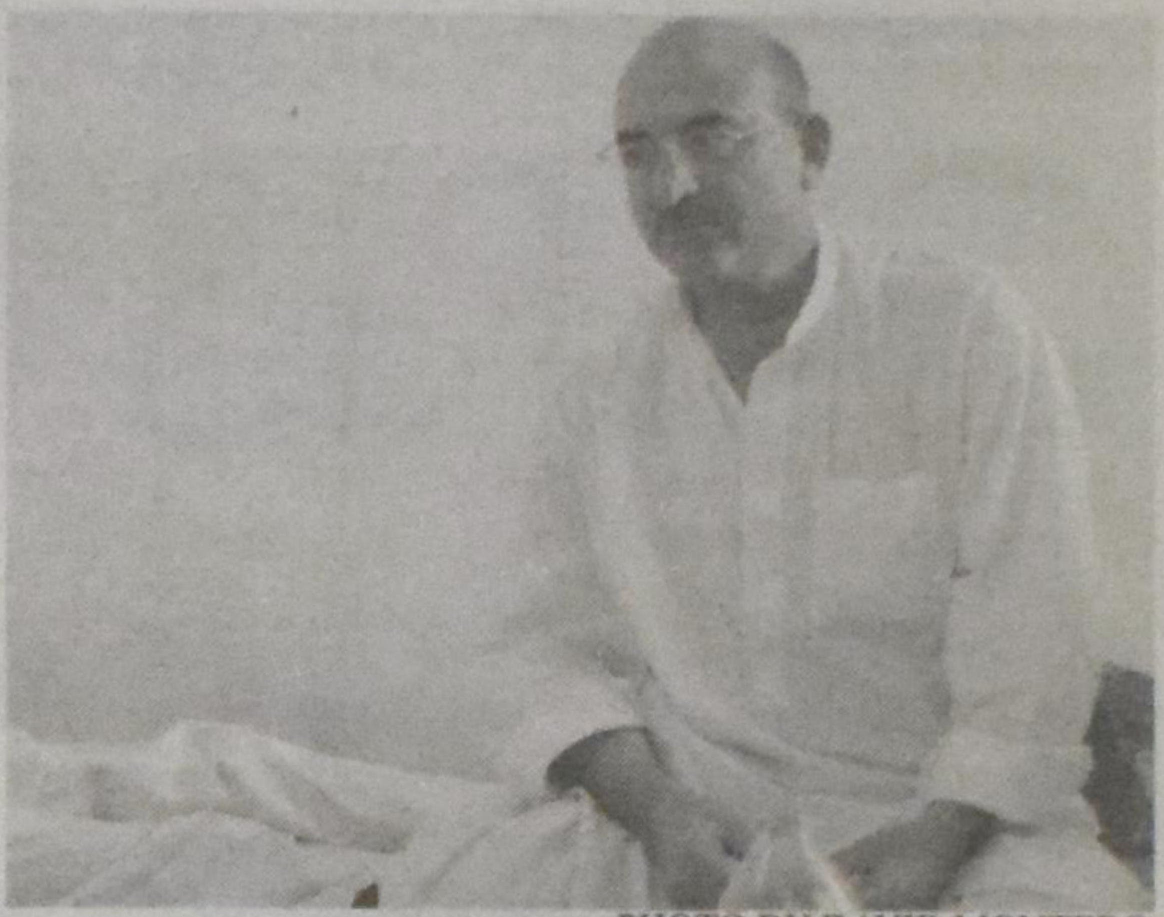


PHOTO BY DAVID MONTERO

And in the frontier region, those voices have barely emerged. Pakistanis, for the most part, are against extremism. But under a barrage of threats and actual gunfire, few are willing to resist vocally. The Taliban thrive on both this public silence and the vacuums of support from the state, observers say.

Prosperity prevents radicalism

The majority is not so silent in Kohat, a district of more than 560,000, although it sits just outside the troubled Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), in an area of the NWFP increasingly prone to suicide bombings and sectarian violence. People here have certainly heard of Mr. Fazlullah, an influential cleric in Swat who, police say, has connections to terrorist groups. But his influence is limited, and there are no other radical clerics like him.

Statistics suggest why: Residents here have the highest per capita income per day in the province, according to 2003 government figures. An impressive 62 percent of the urban population and 44 percent of the overall population are educated, ranking it third out of 24 districts for adult literacy rates in the NWFP. Even 45 percent of women and girls are educated in Kohat city – rare in this region.

Residents say that because the city of Kohat has been a garrison town for more than a century, the district has long had the Army's presence to help ensure a stream of employment, money for schools, and stability. Certainly there are problems typical of the NWFP as well.

"There is lack of justice, lack of security," says Abdul Rauf, president of the Bar Association in Kohat, the district capital and home to some 40,000. "The lack of job opportunities is another thing. We don't have an industrial base here."

But because education and income rates are comparatively high for the district, residents are not only ignoring the Taliban's call but actively fighting back, Mr. Rauf and others say.

The military and the religious

Mussarad Shaffi is proud proof. A local politician and lawyer, she runs a women's crisis center in the city that offers shelter and legal services for victims of domestic violence. Mrs. Shaffi believes in spreading a broader vision of religion and women's rights, even though it threatens her life.

"I'm doing my job at the crisis center, and for that I'm facing so many threats," says Shaffi. "Our men say women who go out of the house are bad women."

But Shaffi and others say that, even with the advantages their city has, there is only so much they can do.

Her concern helps illuminate a troubling observation made by many here and throughout Pakistan: The Army-led administration does not support the democratic institutions that can invigorate an anti-extremist movement. For President Musharraf to support Pakistan's liberal forces, his critics say, he would have to share power with political rivals – a compromise Musharraf is unwilling to make.

Ironically, the only power-sharing his secular, US-backed regime does accommodate is with the religious parties. Those groups, say observers, are the very same forces many blame for stoking extremism in the first place.

"There are two extremes in this country: the elite politicians and their liberal views, and the religious forces," says a police official in Kohat city, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Between the two extremes, there is the leaderless majority. Both sides of the extremes have guns – big guns. The public has no guns. How can you ask them to stand up? But they should. Their children's future depends on it."

As Musharraf suggested to military graduates in April, the Army continues to see itself, not people power, as the central barrier against militancy: "You as officers of the Pakistan Army have to guarantee security of the motherland.... Our arms are the guarantee of peace."

In contrast, Rauf and other observers throughout the province insist that if empowered, a civilian government backed by liberal political parties could contain and begin reversing extremism in a matter of months. Time, he fears, may be running out.

"Suppose the Taliban manage to get to this place with their rocket launchers – what do you expect the police to do?" Says the police official. "If [the Taliban] sit on these mountains and fire rockets at us, we have no rockets to fire back."

Pakistan *continued*

$210 million – even though Punjab, by many accounts, already has the healthiest economic indicators in Pakistan.

"In some villages, the largest employer is the jihadis," Mr. Bengali adds.

Swat is a startling example. Because unemployment is high, Fazlullah is able to summon hundreds of volunteers – who receive meals in exchange – to help build his new madrassah in Mingora, the city of 175,000 where he lives. Situated along the Swat River, the large religious school will someday offer poor students of this city, which has no university, a free education in Fazlullah's ultraconservative brand of Islam. Aides say proudly it will cost nearly $2.5 million, suggesting that while Fazlullah's audiences may generally be poor, he has wealthy patrons.

Since he began preaching two years ago, Fazlullah has drawn more than 15,000 weekly to his Friday prayers. His vision of militant Islam reaches thousands more in the valley by way of his illegal radio station, which he used until recently to warn parents not to send their girls to school. Few parents seem to have heeded that warning, but the government still intervened in May, striking a compromise in which officials would look the other way if Fazlullah stopped preaching against girls' education.

"Tell me, what wrong have I done? I am preaching religion, and religion is not terrorism," Fazlullah says in a brick room on the site of his new madrassah, surrounded by bearded aides.

People turn to cleric for justice

Aside from work, many also turn to Fazlullah for justice. "We are making compromises between rival parties and ending enmities," says Fazlullah.

Fazlullah's growing legitimacy exposes the void left by a justice system that is collapsing in the NWFP. Unlike North and South Waziristan and other parts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), state law technically applies here. But successive layers of bureaucracy – colonial, modern, secular, religious – have made justice, once free and quick, slow and more expensive.

"There is no local justice, no economic justice. Corruption is a bigger problem than you imagine," says Shah Salam Khan, a lawyer of the district high court, mentioning payoffs to judges and police.

In calling for sharia, or Islamic law, what residents really seek is good governance often neglected by the state, says Ayesha Siddiqa, a political analyst in Islamabad. It's a troubling analogy to North and South Waziristan, where local reports say that the Taliban have established their own courts and hospitals, offering services neglected by the state.

And, as in those areas, Taliban violence has surged throughout the NWFP in the past year, suggesting that it, too, is becoming a haven for militancy. Nine criminal cases, including the charges of terrorism, have been filed against Fazlullah. The police say they suspect that he's formed links with terrorist groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed, which is suspected of collaborating with Al Qaeda in a spate of attacks, including a bombing last March in Karachi that killed an American diplomat. He denies these links.

Yet the police say they cannot arrest Fazlullah. "We are ready to go after him anytime. But there are national activities," says Mohammad Yameen Khan, the district police officer of Swat, referring to President Pervez Musharraf's sacking of the country's chief justice, which has spawned growing protests. "You don't want to open too many fronts. The forces are committed elsewhere, in the burning places," he adds, referring to neighboring areas witnessing Taliban-related violence.

Officials, cleric cut a deal

In late May, despite the cases against him, Fazlullah signed a peace deal with local officials, agreeing to prevent his followers from running militant camps in return for keeping his radio station.

Many observers say that the state is simply not interested in taking down the Fazlullahs of Pakistan.

"These people remain a good tool of policy in the region, in Afghanistan ... as well as internally," says Ijaz Khattak, a professor at the University of Peshawar. "If other liberal parties become stronger, they will challenge the regime. These people are there to stop them."

David Montero is a correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

News

Chavez restricting freedoms in Venezuela

Chavez, Correa and Morales

Harry der Nederlanden

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez likes to rail against "the Empire", but he has been methodically building his own. One might cheer on his efforts to get a greater share of his nation's oil wealth for the poor, but he is not satisfied with gaining control of his country's resources. He also wants control over the minds of the people. That may not prove as easy to accomplish.

After absorbing a number of smaller political parties into his own and changing the constitution to give him greater power, Chavez set his sights on the media.. First he shut down the most-watched network in the country, Radio Caracas Television. And when the last opposition television station, Globovision, criticized that move, he threatened to shut it down as well. He declared it to be "an enemy of the state". Clearly, he feels that he is the state.

Chavez' action sparked mass protests led by university students. The protests, mostly in the capital city Caracas, continued for several days. Police arrested dozens of protesters.

According to the *Washington Times*, the two other Latin American leaders who have fallen under Chavez' spell – Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador – are also seeking to put restrictions on freedom of the press. Both also followed Chavez' example in seeking changes to their country's constitutions to consolidate their power.

Supporters of Chavez like to speak of a "new socialism", but Chavez' power grab is hardly new.

Lebanon *continued from p. 1*

more and more heavily armed fighters from other countries, some with experience in Iraq, have been finding safe haven in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon. The aggressive Fatah al-Islam group established its headquarters in the Nahr el-Bared near Tripoli. The U.N. agency overseeing the camp said it had been aware that the heavily armed group was moving in, but it could do nothing to stop it. Fatah al-Islam's leader is a former associate of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an Al Qaeda leader who was killed last year in Iraq.

When Lebanese police pursued the bank robbers to the Palestinian stronghold, a full-scale battle ensued. The army was called in to assert the rule of law, but the battle only escalated. The Lebanese army was stunned by the firepower that the militants had at their command.

According to newspaper reports, crowds of Lebanese in Tripoli cheered the army on in its attempt to root out the predominantly foreign fighters.

There are some 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, most of them settled in 12 different camps. Since these camps have existed for some 60 years, most of the population was born there, but they have no rights of citizenship – they remain refugees. To refer to these Palestinian settlements as camps is perhaps deceptive, for they are densely populated cities. However, they fall outside the authority of the Lebanese government, which only patrols its boundaries. Yet, they are not self-governed either; there is actually little or no authority at all. Different groups and militias compete for influence.

The militant newcomers were not really invited or even welcome. But they moved into the camps in force and have been accused of setting off car bombs in Lebanese Christian neighborhoods.

The *Washington Post* called the militants "guerillas" and described the fierce gun battles as "an internal fight", but the group is hardly native to the Palestinian camps, according to most accounts, and has even clashed with home-grown militias.

Shocked by the fierceness with which the radical group fought back, the Lebanese government ordered the army to do whatever is necessary to eradicate them. Lebanon can't tolerate another state-within-a-state like Hezbollah in the south. Unlike Hezbollah, however, Fatah al-Islam is Sunni, not Shiite. Lebanese government spokesmen charged that the group gets support from Syria and that many were trained there.

Before last summer's ruinous war between Hezbollah and Israel, Lebanon had enjoyed some 16 years of relative peace and prosperity. Before this, the country was devastated by a civil war that raged from 1975 to 1990; it involved several factions plus Syria and Israel. Many fear that the radical militants are seeking to plummet the country into another civil war.

An international agreement keeps the Lebanese army from marching into the camps, but this has not prevented it from shelling the militants ensconced inside the crowded camps. Although the Palestinians may not have welcomed the foreign fighters, the destruction visited on them is being blamed on the Lebanese army and is deepening resentments and anger. And that is, of course, exactly what the militants want. They have only to foment anarchy and violence in order to win recruits.

Ironically, although Lebanon has always refused to accept responsibility for the tens of thousands of Palestinians within its borders (classifying them indefinitely as refugees like other Arab states), last year the government began attempting to improve conditions in the squalid camps by providing proper sewage systems, water and electricity.

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Editorial

Children at the Lord's Supper: a quibble

Harry der Nederlanden

CRC Synod will probably be in the midst of its deliberations (June 9-16) when you read this issue of *CC*. One of the issues before it, though it isn't the subject of a report, will be children at the Lord's Supper. Last year's synod surprised the churches by unexpectedly declaring that there were no biblical grounds for excluding baptized children. The issue has been discussed at several previous synods, producing several reports, both pro and con, in 1986, 1988 and 1995. Although there was no new report before Synod 2006, it suddenly cut through the knot and removed all barriers to children participating in the Lord's supper.

Well, not exactly *all* barriers. The churches were caught by surprise and didn't quite know what to do now. Perhaps some made the transition effortlessly, but I suspect that most hesitated. A few months after the decision had been made, I asked our council whether children were now going to be invited to participate, but the matter had not even been discussed yet. I think most people in our congregation were not even aware that Synod had changed the policy, and our celebrations of the Lord's supper were conducted as before. Children come to the front with their parents, but they do not partake of the elements.

As the overtures addressed to Synod prove, many members and church councils still have questions and misgivings. The latest issue of *The Forum*, a publication of Calvin Theological Seminary, contains four excellent, very readable essays that ably defend Synod's decision and that answer most questions. I strongly recommend them. If you can't find *The Forum* available in your church, you can get it online at http://www.calvinseminary.edu/pubs/forum.php

In the Spring issue, Professor Lyle Bierma addresses the confessional and theological issues; Prof. David Rylaarsdam gives an account of the history of how the Lord's supper has been celebrated and the role of baptism; Prof. John Witvliet addresses the practical questions; and Prof. Jeffrey Weima provides a new reading of one of the Pauline texts that has posed an obstacle to opening the celebration to all regardless of age.

Bierma points out that the Reformed understanding of the covenant sees children as full members. The baptismal form says, "God graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as for us." This is so because the covenant is first of all about what God does in Christ; it is not first of all about our response but about God's gracious acts and God's promises.

We do also, of course, have a part to play, for we are made covenant partners, but that happens first of all on a communal level. God creates a new community, a body of which Christ is the head. We become members of his covenant by becoming members of that body. That demands personal faith and active commitment, but these are the fruit of those two prior acts – God's affirmation of his covenant in Christ and his creation of a new humanity.

With that understanding of the covenant, what's the obstacle to having children participate in the Lord's Supper just as they already participate in infant baptism? It is I Cor. 11:27-29 and the interpretation of that passage in our confessions and forms. Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 81, Bierma points out, stipulates that only "those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins" may come to the table of the Lord. The Belgic Confession, too, warns that "no one should come to this table without examining himself carefully, lest 'by eating and drinking this cup he eat and drink to his own judgment'." This warning clearly echoes Paul's in I Corinthians.

In his brief historical survey of the church's practices, Rylaarsdam points out that in the early church all baptized persons were welcome at communion. The attachment of participation to doing profession only happened much later. Even tiny infants could participate by sucking a bit of wine off the priest's finger.

The doctrine of transubstantiation – that the elements were actually transformed into the body and blood of Christ – also played a role in distancing children from the Eucharist, for fear that they would desecrate the sacred. Gradually the Church (of Rome) developed the sacrament of confirmation as a point of entry that required participants to arrive at "an age of discretion". While the Reformers did away with the sacerdotal machinery, they did uphold the Pauline command that participants be capable of self-examination and discernment.

In fact, Rylaarsdam cites Calvin on I Cor. to the effect that "we offer poison...to our tender children" if we allow them to participate, for it is vain to expect them "to distinguish rightly the holiness of Christ's body" (Institutes 4.16.30). In effect, says Rylaarsdam, Calvin simply assumed that the practice with which he was familiar was logical. He concludes: "The story of baptism and the Lord's Supper is essentially this: what the early church joined together, the later medieval church gradually put asunder," so today we are returning to the practice of the early church. (Rylaarsdam, of course, relates much more of the history, and the essay is worth reading in its entirety.)

Witvliet addresses a host of practical questions about how to implement child participation, including questions about the ability of children to understand and to discern the body. Like Bierma and Rylaarsdam, he refers to Weima's (re)interpetation of I Cor. 11:17-34. Weima's exegesis, thus, in a way becomes central to the four essays presented in *The Forum*. My brief summary won't do justice to his already short essay, so again I urge you to read the original.

Weima points out that the traditional way of reading the phrase "discerning the body" is to assume that it refers to our calling to grasp that this is not about eating and drinking as such, but that what we are doing is remembering what Christ did for us on the cross. It is primarily vertical – theological.

But Paul's admonition comes toward the end of a passage in which he rebukes the believers in Corinth for the way they're celebrating the Lord's Supper. At the time, it was clearly still a shared meal, and some were pigging out while others were going home hungry. In other words, argues Weima, right at the Lord's table class distinctions were playing a role and creating division in the church. If they discerned the body correctly, that is if they saw what it means to be the body of Christ, unified and equal, they wouldn't behave in this way. The emphasis in the text, then, is not on the vertical, on the crucified and risen Lord, but on the horizontal, on this congregation as the body of Christ. "To a congregation where the rich are celebrating the sacrament in a way that marginalizes the poor," Weima summarizes, " Paul issues the challenge to 'recognize the body' – that is, to pay attention to the welfare of their fellow brothers and sisters."

Presto! The text is now no longer an obstacle to including children; in fact, since it's about being more inclusive, we might now enlist it in favor of including everyone on an equal footing.

I want to raise a quibble about this exegetical move. I fully agree with the idea of including children, and I'll even agree that the text may also point to the horizontal relationship – in fact, I'm sure it does. But I bridle at the attempt to displace the vertical interpretation with the horizontal one.

Am I, then, quibbling about a minor point? Perhaps. But I fear we do this sort of exegesis all too often: if we encounter a text that raises problems, we look for a way to re-contextualize it. Since context has a huge impact on meaning, suddenly the text is made to say something very different. Now, there's no doubt that our theologians sometimes do come up with better interpretations, so I don't want to rule a new interpretation out simply because it is new. But if we do this too often, we convey the impression that Scripture can be molded to suit our preferences. More and more, when Scripture is cited, someone will object that you can make Scripture say whatever you please.

In the university and among scholars, generating new interpretations of texts brings recognition. And I admit I groove on discovering new dimensions in texts too. It's also part of every pastor's toolbox. But we must be careful that we don't become too clever. In this case, I see no reason why the horizontal meaning should displace the vertical one.

While class undoubtedly played a role in the way the Corinthians deformed the celebration of the Lord's Supper, I see no reason to assume that Paul is highlighting class divisions here. Perhaps Paul is simply warning against treating this celebration as if it were nothing more than food to fill your stomach. That could be true for the poor as well as the rich, perhaps more so.

Paul goes on to urge the Corinthians to eat their actual meal, that is, to satisfy their hunger, at home before coming to the Lord's table. His admonition is, therefore, part of a gradual formalization of the Lord's Supper, so that it becomes less of a communal mealtime and more of a liturgical act of remembrance. I'd venture to suggest that Paul does indeed want it to be more vertical (though I don't like the vertical-horizontal contrast) and less of a fellowship lunch. That does not exclude what Weima says about class divisions, but puts these in a vertical context.

If my interpretation is right, the text shouldn't act as an obstacle to the participation of children. What child could possibly confuse our present way of celebrating the Lord's Supper with a church picnic?

End of quibble.

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Canada

Letters

Feeling like strangers

Thank you, Frank De Vries for writing "What we Sing" in the May 14th issue. Singing is a very important part of our Christian faith and God has always been exalted in the singing of the inspired psalms and hymns the church has used through the years.

Often when I have a spiritual low it is one of these songs, whether in English or in Dutch, that will flash through my mind and give me the lift I need.

The Bible teaches so clearly that we ought to speak to each other with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:19). No mention in this verse is ever made about the lyrics we sing today, and by the time we come home from church I don't even remember what songs it were we sang.

The change in our singing came about when the Willow Creek church in Chicago began to offer their satellite seminars on church growth. One of their speakers at one time stated that their church growth began when they disposed of all the "Aunts and Uncles and the hymnbooks." Most people thought at that time this to be funny because many older folks have often refused any change in their church.

What we see today, however, is just the opposite. It is now the young rising up against the old (Isaiah 3:5,13). And why is this being tolerated? Because it will keep the youth in the church, many say. But are we more interested in church growth than in keeping God's house a place of reverence and respect (Heb 2:20)? Are we selling out by neglecting being a holy gathering for being attractive to the world and losing our distinctiveness as being a people of God?

Richard Oostra

On the verge of losing a legacy

The article written by Frank de Vries was timely. I also regret the lesser singing of our hymns and miss singing many of the old familiar ones. However, what concerns me most is that the hymns of the church will not become impressed on the hearts and minds of the future generations as they did in the past on ours.

When the time comes that they need the ministry of the hymns the most, for sure in advancing years, they will not be able to draw from their comfort and strength for they will not remember them. The "songs" can never measure up to our hymns. Are we not on the verge of losing the legacy of our forefathers, the rich ministry of our hymns? Can we let this happen?

Didy Prinzen,
a concerned member of the church

Losing the richness?

We enjoy *Christian Courier* very much and read it from A to Z, most of the time. We were struck by the editorial of Frank De Vries "What we sing in church" (May 14 issue).

Prior to our emigration to Canada, we attended de Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands. For the last 50 years we have been members of the CRC in Calgary. For the last number of years, we also have been singing Praise songs, first with a blended service (both Hymns and Praise songs) but as of late more and more Praise songs, with less and less Hymns, with some services with no hymns at all. We use to be a good singing congregation and knew a lot of Hymns by heart, without having Praise teams.

Why is it that we eliminate singing hymns which contain the story of redemption and Salvation? Why is it that we must sing from the overhead which eliminates singing in harmony because we have no music to sing from? We certainly are not opposed to changes, but Councils should consider not only the young people, but also the elderly who often do not wish to complain but in silence disagree.

It seems that the CRC church is trying to compete with other evangelical churches in order to keep young people. But are we accomplishing that by changing our worship style so much that we can't recognize our church as a CRC church any more and feel like strangers in the Church? We learned the Psalms by heart in the Netherlands, then we learned the hymns in Canada, and now we are losing the richness of all that.

There are only a limited number of praise songs, which are often repeated while we have a great number of Hymns (641) and we should therefore have no problems to select songs with which we can praise God and tell the wonderful story of his love.

Durk De Jong

Early history does not apply to resettlement policy

I'm not quite sure why Bert den Boggende quibbled with my use of "ancestral lands" in his letter "Rewriting South African history?" (May 28), when all I was referring to was lands that black tribes used to live on before 1913 and from which they were expelled after 1913, when records were beginning to be kept. No need to go back in history to 1652 when it comes to the land settlement process under way in South Africa. (By the way, the Venda people lived in what was later known as Transvaal and now as the Limpopo province since the time period between the 13th and 16th century, refuting Bert's statement that "strictly speaking, only the Bushmen and Khokhoi can regard southern Africa as ancestral land.")

To say, as Bert does, that the South African government "seems to be rewriting history, and in so doing could be guilty of injustice" cannot be argued on the basis of current resettlement policy. A recent article taken from the *Bloomberg News* in South Africa illustrates what is happening:

"Rietkuil Farm, South Africa – Thateus Letokho breaks into a broad smile, while hundreds around him sing and dance, as he holds aloft the deed to a farm South Africa's apartheid government forced his family and neighbours to leave in 1977. Following a decade-long struggle, Mr. Letokho and 877 members of his rural community are returning to the 2,718-acre Rietkuil farm, 240 kilometres north-west of Pretoria, after the government handed it back to them in March….

"Francois Mouton sold Rietkuil, a dairy and grain farm to the government last year for 4 million rand (US$574,874) half of what he asked for, abandoning land he had lived on for 25 years. Mr. Mouton, who bought the farm from the government for about 1 million rand in 1981, accepts that the restitution process is necessary, though he says he is bitter about not being fully compensated."

Apparently the farmer himself did not consider the resettlement plan unjust. He just wanted more money, which is perhaps warranted, seeing that he probably improved the farm considerably in the 25 years that he owned it. At the same time, he did not mind profiting from the unjust removal of black farmers back in 1977. So is half the market value an unjust price for ill-gotten land? Yet without condoning everything that is being done, I would urge caution in judging attempts by the current South African government to empower black South Africans, who have clearly suffered from years of oppression.

Bert Witvoet
St. Catharines, ON

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As pork prices soar, Chinese put brakes on corn for ethanol

Peter Ford

Beijing Ethanol production has put the Chinese government in an unpleasant bind, as fears rise that the environmentally friendly gasoline additive is also fueling politically dangerous increases in the price of food – particularly pork, a key staple.

With the ethanol industry gobbling up a growing share of China's corn harvest, authorities have stomped on the brakes to slow what one official report calls "blind" investment in distilleries.

"China cannot sacrifice food security for energy: that seems to be the majority view in the government now," says Zhang Zhongjun, deputy head of the Beijing bureau of the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Prime Minister Wen Jiabao offered the latest sign of government concern when he made a highly publicized visit last weekend to a piggery and a meat market in Xi'an, about 750 miles southwest of Beijing. The price of pork has gone up by 29 percent over the past year and the price of live pigs by 71 percent, according to the Agriculture Ministry.

Chinese pig market

In a country where people eat more pork than anywhere else in the world except Germany, that jump in the price of a staple has dominated recent headlines and sparked grumbling.

"The government is going all out to ensure the supply of pork and keep it affordable," Mr. Wen reassured a supermarket crowd, according to the Xinhua state news agency.

"The Chinese government is very sensitive to this," says Hu Xingdou, a political analyst at the Beijing Institute of Technology. "They are afraid that rising prices will affect social stability. They have not forgotten that inflation was an important reason for people to get involved in the events of 1989," when students led massive protests in Tiananmen Square.

Industry analysts blame the price rises partly on a shortage of pigs in the wake of outbreaks of "blue-ear disease" around China.

Though the authorities have publicly admitted to only 300 deaths, they have privately reported 100,000 mortalities to international agencies, and even that figure is not credible, say experts.

"Several million pigs may have died, we just don't know," says one international expert familiar with the situation. Chinese farmers raised 465 million pigs last year.

At the root of the problem, though, say agriculture analysts, is the rising cost of pig feed, which is comprised mostly of corn. Despite a bumper crop last year, corn prices have risen by nearly 30 percent over the past nine months on the Dalian Commodities Exchange.

That, says Luo Yunbo, head of the food-science department at China Agriculture University, is because "corn is being sought for industrial purposes, such as ethanol, not just agricultural use."

Pushback on ethanol

Ethanol has been trumpeted as the alternative fuel of the future, offering cleaner energy and new opportunities for farmers in developing countries.

China's current Five Year Plan sets the goal of using biofuels for 15 per-cent of the country's transport needs by 2020; already gas stations in a number of provinces mix 10 percent ethanol into the gasoline they sell.

But critics around the world have recently begun to question the unconsidered effects of large-scale ethanol production, such as increasing competition for human or animal food supplies. And in China, where an estimated 30 million people died in a famine less than 50 years ago, many have reservations about using food for fuel.

As ethanol factories large and small have

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman

All wired up and nowhere to go

My wife was at a medical conference on maternity care and the following quote came up in one of the lectures. The person quoted is Jusapie Padlayat, a Salluit elder (Nunavik, Quebec). The elder is commenting on the practice of flying pregnant First Nation women to major urban centres four weeks prior to their expected delivery date in case there are complications or they need a C-section. This, of course, separates them from their family, friends, and the tradition of birthing with their people. The elder says:

> "I can understand that some of you may think that birth in remote areas is dangerous. And we have made it clear what it means for our women to birth in our communities. And you must know that a life without meaning is much more dangerous."

More dangerous than birth without advanced medical technologies is a life without meaning, claims the elder. This is a profound statement that I want to unpack.

Imagine this vulnerable, pregnant woman, hundreds of kilometers from family, friends, and tradition for four to six weeks of some of the most significant moments in a woman's – and a community's – life. She lay on this bed in this strange, antiseptic square room, surrounded by sophisticated medical technology. She is "safe," but completely disembedded from the traditions that have held her throughout her life.

This picture of technological advancement coupled with cosmic homelessness is not just a picture of the trials of First Nation's culture. It is a picture of us all – everyone around the globe who is caught up in the ambiguities and ambivalence of modern life. We are all like this woman: fully connected with the latest technology, but completely disconnected from our ancient traditions; luxurious in wiring, but metaphysically bereft, and waiting, yearning for something to be born. It is what has been called the postmodern moment. A moment of forgetfulness and longing.

Christian tradition as gift

The rational strengths of science have done wonders, but they have also taken many wonders away. If this universe is just the random collision of molecules, birthed by accident, and fated to fire or ice, we are left with little horizon of meaning. Our planet floats through space: lost, alone, and spinning on its axis to a tune inspired by no one. This is the tale of despair that haunts our public institutions today. We have lost something very rich and necessary to human flourishing. A life without meaning – it's dangerous, disenchanting, dehumanizing.

Modernity is a disregard for traditional authority in favour of autonomy. Even in some churches "tradition" is understood to be synonymous with "confinement" or even "oppression" (or maybe just "organs"). What if we resisted our modern allergy and thought of our Christian tradition in this way: the passing on of hope, the outrageous claim that our world belongs to God?

ICS professor Ron Kuipers put it this way in an inaugural address recently: what if we saw ourselves as a link in a chain of belief, a chain that stretches back to the story of the love of God in Jesus Christ and reaches forward to a new world, God's next world where all are embedded in the divine shalom. Our Reformed, Christian faith tradition becomes a *spiritual link*, a cosmic home in which we can be found and nurtured. If modern culture has disembedded the West from its ancient traditions, postmodern culture may be open to reconsider re-embedding itself in a life-giving community of love and justice, as it is ignited by God's Spirit in Christ. We practice this hope.

In this way, our prayers before meals, our routines of church attendance, our habits of hospitality and generous giving – these all become moments of re-attaching ourselves to something larger than our own sullen independence. Tradition becomes a gift that re-connects us with our true home.

I've heard it said that First Nation people have been ravaged by the transition to modern global culture. This is definitely true, but only part of the truth. We have ***all*** been affected by the malaise of modern life. When we realize we have ***all*** been wrapped up in the same struggle, we can better begin to help and heal. This may be the birth we are waiting for.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

Stewardship

Chinese farmers trudging home

sprung up in China's corn producing regions in recent years, they have begun to compete with animal-feed manufacturers for raw materials.

The industrial use of corn nearly doubled between 2001 and 2005, to 23 million tons, according to a study released last December by the National Development and Reform Committee, China's chief economic planning agency. That represented 16.5 percent of the corn harvest in 2005.

The result, said the report, is a shortage of corn. "Corn supplies to the processing industry compete with supply for [animal] feed, which impacts the development of stockbreeding."

The proportion of China's corn crop used for nonfood purposes is dwarfed by the 30 percent of American corn that goes into ethanol, and Chinese ethanol production – estimated at 3.7 million tons by the Louisiana State University Agriculture Center in 2005 – was a quarter of US levels.

But "China is different," argues the FAO's Mr. Zhang. "America and Brazil have huge land areas and plenty of water," he points out. "China has shortages of water and arable land, and it is a deficit country," importing more grain than it exports.

Debate in China picking up speed

In the ongoing debate among Chinese leaders and scholars about the value of ethanol and biofuels, "more and more people think that China's potential is not so big, that China cannot use food for fuel because food security is more important than energy and because food is politically very important," Zhang says.

Such arguments convinced the government to slap new controls on the corn-processing industry late last December, suspending all investment projects still in the pipeline and insisting that all future ethanol projects should apply for approval from state planning agencies.

The continuing rise in corn prices since the beginning of this year suggests that the central government is having its usual difficulty in controlling developments in China's provinces. But the crisis has not deterred the authorities from pursuing other ethanol distilling projects and biofuel experiments.

A state-owned grain and oils conglomerate will launch a pilot project later this year to process cassava – a starchy tuber that is not considered a food in China – into ethanol. Plans are also under way to plant tens of thousands of acres of jatropha – also inedible and grown in wastelands – by the end of the decade.

Peter Ford is a staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Caloric excess

Do you know how many calories you really need? How many calories do you think are just simply wasted? *How efficient are our bodies?*

In North America many will say that they need a car; yet, in most other parts of the world a car is regarded as a luxury and excess. Someone who drives a Neon may say that driving an Escalade is excessive. In the same way, we may say that we need to eat meat every day, while for others that is a rarity – a luxury. To be blunt, we eat many more calories than we really need; whereas in many places of the world, people starve. We get more than our daily bread, when others don't get enough!

On the labels of many food items the term "percentage daily value" is used. This is based on a 2,000 calories per day diet. According to auto.howstuffworks.com, this is a rough average of what people eat in a day. But your body or mine may require more or less than that. Height, weight, gender, age and activity level all affect caloric needs. There are three main factors involved in calculating how many calories your body needs per day:

– basal metabolic rate (BMR) – the amount of energy our bodies need at rest
– thermic effect of food – the amount of energy our bodies use to digest the food we eat
– physical activity – anything we do

According to this same website, we burn about 60-70 per cent of our calories just for our BMR. It's the energy we use to keep our hearts ticking, our lungs working, our minds churning, our eyes flickering, our body on temperature, etc. It also states that men on average have a higher BMR than women. Women are more efficient. I guess that also makes it harder for women to lose weight. But really, in terms of weight control strategy, there's not much I can do about my BMR – it's part of God's design of my body.

Now what about the thermic effect of food? From my own experience on one of those weight-reducing 'flushing' diets in which you eat a lot of vegetable soup for every meal for a week, I've experienced a weight loss of 5-6 lbs. in a week. I'm sure it must take more calories to digest the cellulose and other fibers in a high vegetable diet than the calories that I take in. All the bulk of soup and fiber along with the restriction on meats and carbohydrates means that I'm running a deficit calorie budget – especially when I add more of the last factor: lots of physical activity!

I found it interesting in my brief study to learn how efficient our bodies are. That is what drew me to the above website in the first place. Apparently, when I ride my bike on my usual loop, I burn about 21 calories per km. In some hilly parts, a bit more. (This computes to the equivalent of about 360 km per liter, pretty good compared to my VW Jetta diesel which gets at best 20 km per liter.) Yes, I know, my bike doesn't weigh much and I average 20 kph when I ride, but I hope you get the point. It's no wonder my cousin's children in the Netherlands have fewer problems with obesity than our children and grandchildren do here. They use their bikes daily to go to school and get around.

So, what does this all mean for us? Most of us take in a lot more calories than we need! Understanding where the calories are used in the body helps me to know that there is nothing I can do about my BMR. However, I can alter my diet to consume more foods that have less energy and require more energy for my body to digest. And, of course, the 20-30 per cent calories of the total for physical activity is something I can alter.

Now writing this article must consume some calories, right? I mean, I need to work my fingers to punch the keys of my computer's keyboard. I suppose if I pull out an old mechanical typewriter like the one on which I learned to type many moons ago, I would probably burn more calories especially when my frustrations rise every time the keys jammed.

My sister and sister-in-law both participate in Weight Watchers – a program which counts calories by apportioning a 'point value' system to foods participants eat. I know the program works for those who are disciplined because it is a simple matter of burning more calories than you take in. Ramping up the physical activity ramps up the effect.

As stewards of our bodies, we need to have the discipline to restrain the caloric excess. We'll pay the price in harm to our bodies if we don't – sooner or later. In our society convenience predominates – comfortable cars and homes – and the many high calorie foods and snacks that make it difficult for us to limit our caloric intake to what we need. Let's exercise some discipline. I include myself in that too. It means I've got to enjoy my food in fewer and smaller mouthfuls.

Stewardly Tip: Find alternative comforts: Often when something stresses us or frustrates us we look for comfort. We might reach for a cigarette, a cup of coffee or even an O'Henry bar. Often a pleasure is sought to displace a negative. In the challenge to reduce the caloric excess, we should try to find other non-caloric pleasures that we enjoy that can displace that urge. Replace it with a short story, a crossword puzzle, a carrot or celery stick or sipping some fresh water.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to Christian Courier or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Significance

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Church

Protestants hope for cooperation from Latin American Catholics

By Luigi Sandri

Aparecida, Brazil, (ENI) – The outcome of a gathering of Latin American Roman Catholic bishops will show whether their church wishes to maintain its "monopoly" of faith on the continent, or whether it accepts the presence of other churches and religions, says an Argentine Methodist theologian attending the meeting as an observer.

"Only in the final document, which is not yet ready, will we see the balance between these two perspectives," said Néstor Oscar Miguez, a Methodist pastor who teaches at the ISEDET Protestant theological institute in Buenos Aires. Miguez is one of seven non-Catholic Christian observers at the fifth general conference of bishops from Latin America and the Caribbean, known by its Spanish acronym CELAM.

"If the first point of view prevails, of course it will lead to some tensions in the relationship between the Catholic and our Protestant churches," Miguez told Ecumenical News International.

Pope Benedict XVI opened the conference on May 13, which continued until May 31.

Latin America accounts for 45 percent of the world's 1.1 billion Catholics, but in many parts of the continent church statistics show the faithful are leaving their church, many to join Pentecostal denominations that some in the Catholic hierarchy describe as "sects".

Miguez told ENI that differing points of view have been expressed during the meeting: "Some bishops consider the presence of other Christians to be a threat to the homogeneous Roman Catholic block in Latin America; others, however, consider diversity to be 'creative', and want to adopt an ecumenical approach to this issue, taking into account and respecting other religions, such as pre-Columbian ones, and other churches."

The expectation of many outside observers is that the final document of the conference will have an ecumenical approach, a hope underlined by the non-Catholic observers.

"In spite of historical and doctrinal differences that prevent us – and this is something painful – to take part together in the Lord's Supper, there are many links between us to proclaim together the life Jesus gives to our peoples," the non-Catholic observers stated in a letter to CELAM leaders.

Norwegian bishops disagree on same-sex marriage proposal

By Oivind Ostang

Oslo (ENI) – The two most recently appointed (Lutheran) Church of Norway bishops have expressed support for a government proposal that Norway's marriage law be changed to allow for same-sex marriages. Their nine colleagues, however, after being interviewed by the *Vaart Land* daily newspaper, rejected this proposal to describe formal same-sex partnerships as "marriage".

Norway's centre-left coalition government in mid-May proposed that the country's law on marriage be amended to cover "homosexual and heterosexual couples". It said the country's law on same-sex registered partnerships should be abolished, and that married same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples when it comes to child adoption and artificial insemination. The proposal said churches should have the right to wed same-sex couples, but should not be forced to do so.

Bishops Tor Joergensen of Bodoe and Solveig Fiske of Hamar said they supported the government's proposal, including church weddings for same-sex couples.

The present moderator of the Church of Norway bishops' conference, Bishop Ole Skjevesland of Agder and Telemark, however, told the *Vaart Land* that he sees "little meaning in supporting an arrangement at odds with what the Church understands to be a wedding."

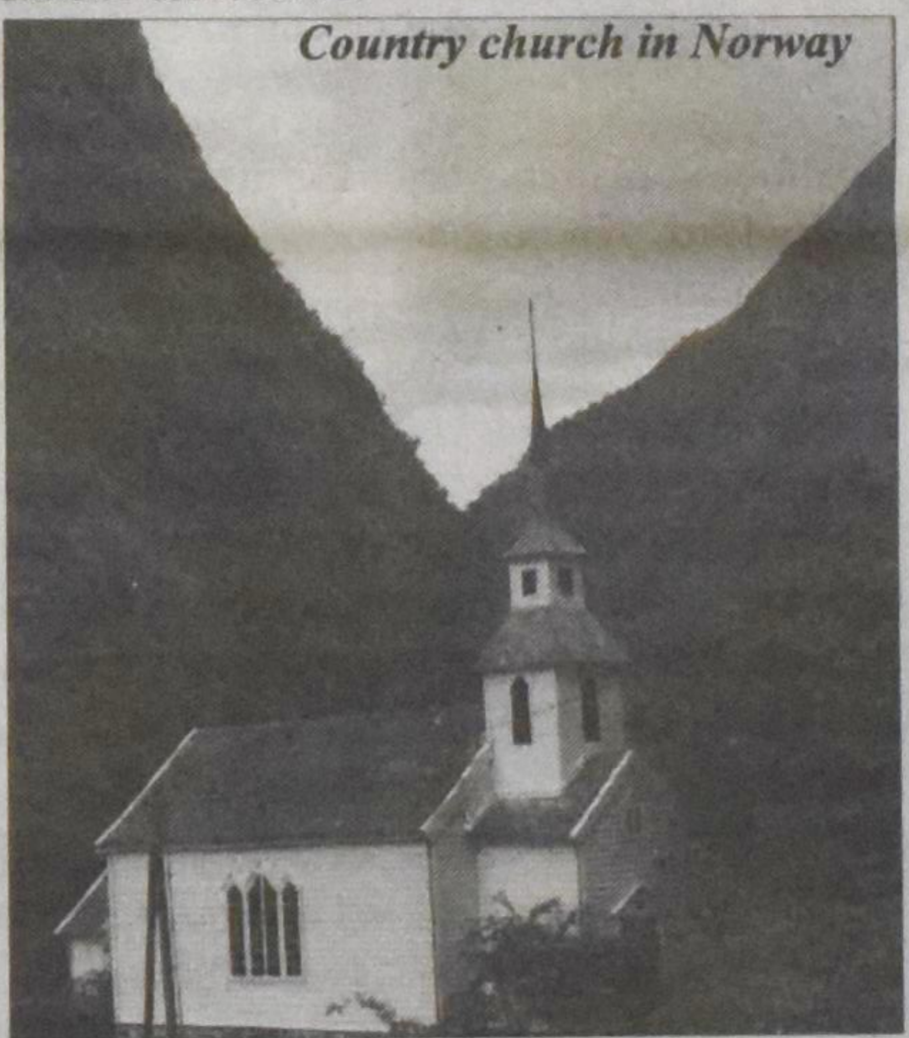
Bishop Ole Hagesaether of Bjoergvin said "registered partnership and marriage can never be the same thing," while Bishop Ole Kvarme of Oslo said he sees the government's proposal as a break with "Christian tradition and our country's broad cultural heritage."

Joergensen and Fiske have also been publicly criticised for commenting on the government's proposal before the bishops' conference has discussed the matter.

Bishop emeritus Per Loenning, a former member of the World Council of Churches central committee, said Bishops Joergensen and Fiske were "abdicating" from the bishop's of exercising a "ministry of unity".

In a reader's letter to the *Vaart Land*, Bishop Loenning said the statements by the two bishops were causing people to leave the Church of Norway for "churches that appear to know better what they stand for than does the Church of Norway." The other serving bishops have not criticized their two colleagues in public, but have indicated that the issue needs further discussion.

Country church in Norway



French Reformed and Lutherans move closer to unity

Bernadette Sauvaget

Paris (ENI) – Two French Protestant churches have agreed to start discussions with the aim of creating a united denomination by 2013 bringing together Reformed and Lutheran Christians.

"The French religious landscape has become very complex," said the Rev. Marcel Manoël, president of the national council of the Reformed Church of France (ERF). "That complexity makes communication difficult."

A joint 17-20 May meeting of the ERF synod and that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of France (EELF) in Montbéliard in eastern France voted almost unanimously to start a three-year process of discussions at the local level about the idea of unification, before proceeding to the next step.

Both the Reformed and the Lutheran traditions trace their roots back to the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 16th century.

The Rev. Joël Dautheville, president of the executive council of the Lutheran church, said: "The message of the Reformation is still relevant to today's world."

Still, the idea could face opposition from within the Lutheran minority, especially in the Paris region, observers say. The Reformed church has 300,000 members while the Lutheran church accounts for 36,000 people.

"There is no question of the big Reformed brother gobbling up its smaller Lutheran sister," Manoël told journalists at the synod meeting.

The projected union would not apply in the Alsace-Lorraine region of eastern France, which has separate church structures. There, the Lutheran and Reformed denominations created a Union of Protestant Churches in 2006.

US Muslims feel assimilated, Pew survey finds

Chris Herlinger

New York (ENI) – Muslims in the United States appear to have been largely assimilated into the broader US society, finds a new survey which also reports that nearly eight in 10 Muslim Americans overwhelmingly condemn the practice of suicide bombings.

Still, the survey released this week by the Pew Research Center found that about a quarter of young Muslim Americans feel there are times when such bombings can be justified.

Nonetheless, the picture painted of the survey – said to be the first comprehensive, national survey of Muslim Americans – finds that they are relatively happy in the United States and feel more a part of US society than Muslims who have emigrated to Europe feel about living in their countries.

The survey found that a majority of Muslim Americans believe in the "American Dream" and that hard work pays off. Seven out of 10 agree with the belief "that most people who want to get ahead in the United States can make it if they are willing to work hard", the survey found.

At the same time, a majority surveyed – 53 percent – say life for Muslim Americans has become more difficult in the United States since the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Among the key findings of the survey, released on May 22, was that slightly less than half of US Muslims, 47 percent, view themselves as primarily Muslim and then as Americans. That was in marked contrast to Muslims surveyed in Western Europe, where majorities said they were Muslim first and then citizens of their own countries.

The survey also found that, by a two-to-one margin, Muslim Americans see no conflict between living in contemporary US society and being a devout Muslim.

The survey based on a national sample conducted earlier in 2007 of 1050 Muslims living in the United States, estimates that there are now some 2.35 million Muslim Americans; other studies have placed the US Muslim population at about 6 million.

Mass conversion to Buddhism in India

Anto Akkara

New Delhi (ENI) – Church leaders in India say they are elated at a mass conversion ceremony in Mumbai said by organizers to have gathered nearly 100,000 people at which thousands of oppressed Dalits and nomadic people embraced Buddhism.

"We are happy that the Dalits have come forward boldly to assert the freedom of religion," Bishop D. K. Sahu, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, a grouping of 29 Orthodox and Protestant churches, told Ecumenical News International from the council's headquarters in Nagpur. "This vindicates our stand that freedom of religion is a fundamental right."

Prakash Ambedkar, who organized the May 27 gathering, which Indian media described as the largest ever mass conversion ceremony in India since its independence in 1947, told ENI, "Our people are looking at conversion as a means of [social] liberation."

Several thousand Dailts had embraced Buddhism at the gathering, said Ambedkar, who is also head of the Republican Party of India. He said the ceremony had been held to celebrate the mass conversion organized by his grandfather, Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

An architect of independent India's constitution, B. R. Ambedkar is known as the father of the Dalit movement in India. He led thousands of Dalits into Buddhism to escape the Hindu caste system during a public ceremony on October 14, 1956 at Nagpur.

"Dalit", meaning "trampled upon" in Sanskrit, refers to low castes treated as untouchables under the caste system in India which enjoins them to undertake degrading and dehumanising tasks such as scavenging and menial jobs.

Dalits accounts for more than 18 percent of India's 1.1 billion people. Two thirds of the 26 million Christians in the world's second most populous nation are also Dalits.

Pakistani Christians protest about intimidation in 'tribal areas'

Anto Akkara

Bangalore, India (ENI) – Churches in Pakistan are urging the government to protect a Christian community facing threats from Islamic fundamentalists to either convert to Islam or shut their churches and migrate from their native villages in the North West Frontier Province.

"The authorities in Pakistan have responded half-heartedly to the situation, sending only one police officer to protect the community, who is stationed at the door of the church," the National Council of Churches of Pakistan, a grouping of four Protestant churches, said in a statement on May 24.

The NCCP statement noted that hundreds of Christians in less developed parts of the country such as Charsadda and Mardan in the North West Frontier Province "are now extremely afraid and many cannot sleep. Some families have already left the area, whilst others have sent their female members to safer places."

While some officials have dismissed the threats, Victor Azariah, NCCP general secretary, told Ecumenical News International: "It's a serious issue as far as Christians are concerned." He added, "The religious minorities in Pakistan often face these kinds of dangers."

Separately, in Glasgow, Scotland, a paper circulated at the May 23-27 assembly of Civicus, the world alliance for citizen participation, quoted Maulana Fazalullah, a pro-Taliban cleric, referring to non-governmental organizations and saying, "These foreign agents are against our religion. How can we allow them to work here when we know they come with an American agenda and support Israel?"

He told the Inter Press Service news agency in a telephone interview from his home in the North West Frontier Province, which borders Afghanistan, "All Pakistanis working for them [NGOs] are enemies of the country." The IPS report said NGOs and aid agencies have been finding it increasingly difficult in recent months to work in some of the most underdeveloped parts of Pakistan.

More than 95 percent of the 153 million people of Pakistan are Muslims, while Christians number more than three million. Hindus and others account for the rest of the population.

"The constitution of Pakistan guarantees protection of religious minorities and safeguards religious freedom," the Roman Catholic Church reminded the government in a press statement on May 18. Archbishop Lawrence Saldana of Lahore, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, said the government was "duty bound" to uphold these "constitutional guarantees".

The Catholic Church also urged the government "to effectively ban" provocation against non-Muslims through the use of loud speakers, hate literature and the media as has happened in the North West Frontier Province, and to take measures to promote interfaith respect. "Fundamentalist groups are trying to enforce Sharia [rule by Islamic law] in the tribal areas under Taliban influence. They see Christians as a hindrance to this agenda," Archbishop Saldana told ENI.

Food used as political tool in Zimbabwe, says church group

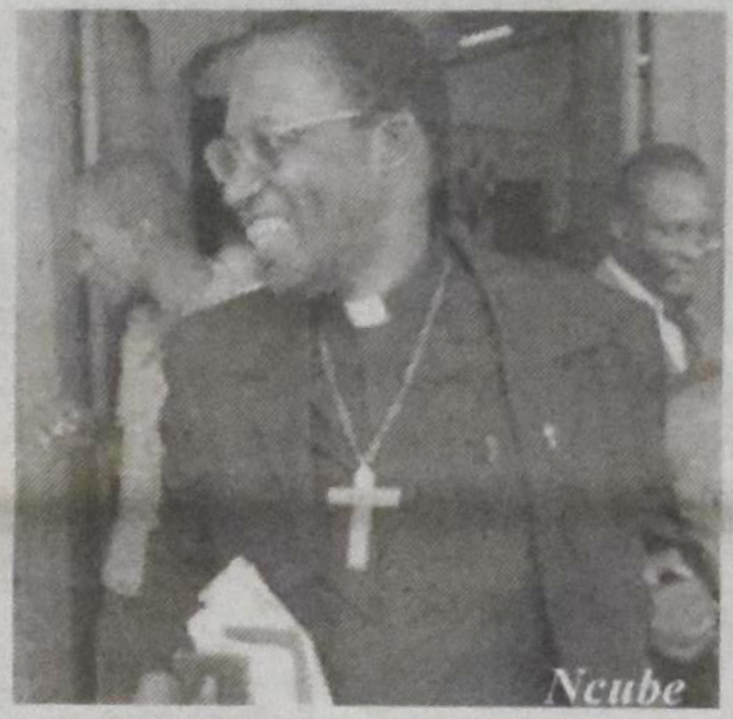
Harare (ENI) – Zimbabwean authorities are withholding food aid from opponents of President Robert Mugabe's government, a church coalition in the southern African country has asserted.

"The Zimbabwe Peace Project is appealing to the government to ensure that food and other aid are accessed by all citizens regardless of political affiliation," said a statement issued by the Zimbabwe Peace Project– Churches Working for Peace.

Zimbabwe is facing a serious food shortage this year, with an expected 1.3 million ton grain deficit. The UN World Food Program is feeding at least 1.5 million people in dire need.

"The ZPP has documented evidence of partisan distribution of food and other aid from a project run in the Manicaland province," the church coalition said in its May 11 statement. It added, "There is no reason to believe that the situation is different in other provinces. Senior officials within the ruling party and within government have in the past threatened those suspected to belong to the opposition with hunger if they did not conform."

Zimbabwe is also reeling under an economic and political crisis with annual inflation currently running at 2200 percent, widespread poverty, and tensions between the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front party and the main opposition Movement for Democratic Change.


Ncube

In recent weeks, outspoken Roman Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube has urged church leaders to take their cue from colleagues in neighbouring South Africa who, he said, played a prominent role, along with trade unions, in opposing the former white minority apartheid regime in their country.

"I think we can learn from South Africa," Ncube explained in a radio interview at the end of April. "The pastors would march in front, and they organized a whole lot of activities to put pressure on the government. So we must learn from them. Churches must stop this sweet talk and engage now in putting pressure which will cause the government to bend."

The Zimbabwean government blames the present food shortage on poor rains in the southern African region last year. However, some analysts say the seizure of farms from white commercial farmers under the country's controversial land reforms is partly to blame for the dramatic slump in food production.

Sunni extremists threaten to kill Christian converts in northern Iraq

SULAIMANIYAH (IRIN) – A Sunni extremist group – al-Qaeda in Iraq – has threatened to kill Muslim youths in the northern city of Sulaimaniyah should they convert to Christianity or Zoroastrianism.

"We are hunting those who have converted to Christianity or Zoroastrianism as we consider them renegades and God's punishment must be implemented by killing them," said a statement posted on the al-Farouk website on April 22 and signed by al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The statement, whose authenticity could not be immediately confirmed, also urged the youth to join "[the] Mujahedin and hoist the jihad flag against the crusaders who are occupying Iraq, instead of supporting them."

"We are not afraid of them; in fact, they are welcome if they want to kill us," said Sabeer Ahmed, 37, who converted to Christianity seven months ago and works at Christ Church in the town of Pishdar in Sulaimaniyah province.

"We will be happy to be martyrs when we sacrifice ourselves for our religion," said Ahmed who works as a freelance journalist with Kurdish media groups.

According to Ahmed, about 500 Kurdish Muslim youths have converted to Christianity since 2006 throughout Kurdistan. It is not known how many, if any, have converted to Zoroastrianism, once a dominant religion in much of Iran. The faith has now dwindled to very few followers.

Economic gain

Muslim residents of Sulaimaniyah say the conversions were motivated by economic gain, as many of the youths in the area are unemployed.

"Missionaries are exploiting the harsh economic situation that these youths experience in these areas as they are unemployed and almost depressed," said Sheikh Hassan Abdullah, 57, one of the Sulaimaniyah elders. "In some cases, the youths want to go abroad and this [conversion to Christianity] is an easy way to achieve their dream, as they can say that they are threatened and need a safe haven," Abdullah added.

A priest in Sulaimaniyah, who refused to be named because of the sensitive nature of the issue, denied Christians were exploiting the harsh economic conditions of young people or that they were promising them material gains to convert to Christianity. "Those youths [converts] reached their decision after having become fully convinced about what Christianity teaches. They believe in Christ and nothing else and we're sure of that," the priest said. "This is their decision and no one forced them to convert. We do not accept anyone who seeks only material gain," he added.

Local officials in Iraq's Kurdistan refused to comment.

Humanitarian aid "cover"

After the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Sunni and Shia religious leaders said that US missionaries, mainly evangelicals, were pouring into predominantly Muslim Iraq shrouded in secrecy or under the guise of providing humanitarian aid.

Sheikh Ahmed al-Shafie, a member of the hardline Association of Muslim Scholars in Sulaimaniyah, denounced it as a "negative phenomena in an Islamic country" and blamed the "weakness" of Islamic propaganda.

"We strongly condemn this disgraceful act against Islam and Muslims which demonstrates that there are hidden hands with foreign agendas [working] to destroy the society of this country," al-Shafie told IRIN. "We have a real weakness in our Islamic propaganda owing to the difficult situation our country is facing, and that makes many of our youths convert to Christianity after defaming Islam as a terrorist religion," he added without naming the foreign agents.

Another priest in Baghdad who also refused to be named said there had been "extensive efforts by US religious organizations immediately after the [2003] invasion of Iraq but now these efforts had faded as many churches were attacked and closed by extremists hunting down Christians."

Following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the Jedda-based World Muslim League (WML) said that some "non-Muslim organizations" might exploit the humanitarian crisis in the country.

"Non-Muslim organizations are preparing to enter Iraq to start their activity under the cover of providing humanitarian aid, as they normally exploit crises, wars and tragedies," WML Secretary-General Abdullah bin Abdumohsen al-Turki said.

He warned of "the dangers this poses to Muslims in Iraq" and called on the Iraqi people to adhere to Islam and to stay away from "ethnic and sectarian feuds."

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Nature/Pastoral

Flowers & Thistles

Curt Gesch

Wilderness in the suburbs (or, Hamilton in the raw)

If you want to experience *raw nature*, you don't have to go much farther than Hamilton, Ontario. Having been snowbound in Hamilton in the winter, I returned to find it in the throes of spring. More precisely, in the throes of vehicles. Noise, noise, and more noise.

Not too long ago, I watched a news documentary about the effects of noise on songbirds in Banff National Park. It seems that within a hundred metres or so of the Trans-Canada Highway, there is so much vehicular noise that many lady songbirds have trouble responding appropriately to their potential mates. (Male humans at hockey events, whether at the arena or in the home, also have trouble making their females hear them no matter what decibel level they reach in their testosterone-driven hootings.)

Mornings – early mornings – are another story. Birds are active and noisy. Vehicles, while still numerous, seem quieter, more subdued. All it takes is a walk to see Hamilton at its best.

Unlike my previous visit to this metropolis, this time I was domiciled on "The Mountain." Upon awakening at the perfectly natural hour of 6:00 a.m., I proceeded to take a nature hike, with the mid-point being that busiest part of the human biome – Tim Horton's. It took me a while to identify the abiotic parts of the biome: pop cans, Tim Horton's cups, pop cans, a condom, pop cans, pieces of newspaper, bits of plastic, beer cans, used chewing gum, and pop cans.

Before too long, however, I was able to identify biotic members of the biome as well. European house sparrows were still making the same boring *chirrrrp* that they made in February, with the difference being that the occurrence of the song was virtually continuous.

European starlings looked somehow less portly and curious, and more frantic, than they had in February: less like Rembrandt's prosperous Dutch burgher; more like a teenager cleaning up before the parents get home.

Herring gulls were pests, scurrying on flapping feet after any tidbit of garbage discovered by starling or sparrow, perhaps resisting the inroads of more ambitious immigrant species with a better work ethic.

Reaching Tim Horton's, I discovered that many members of the human species barely acknowledged greetings, sometimes rubbing eyes or expelling greying vapour in response to the nearly universal human *hello*. Older members of the species, predominantly male, seemed more sociable, returning greetings with staid replies like, "Well, I guess I better get going," and "I wonder what I'm going to do today."

The *return* from this nexus of human interaction yielded more interesting sightings. A northern mockingbird flew into a tree and began mimicking something that sounded like a saw being sharpened. A house sparrow attacked and drove off a starling that competed for a small patch of lawn, presumably the breakfast nook. A common grackle then alighted and caused the retreat of the sparrow, which flew to a branch of a honeysuckle bush and cried *chirrrrrp, chirrrrrp, chirrrrrp,* until the grackle (presumably unused to avian rap) left.

Back in my children's yard, the fun was just beginning. The house sparrows were furiously feeding their young in the bungalows-turned-sparrow-slums made by the previous owner of the house. A grackle munched on some baby bird or other.

A male cardinal whistled like a Medici calling his concubine. Though not a concubine, I answered and drove the red bird insanely competitive. Robins chirped, mourning doves mourned, and the goldfish in the pond. . . *finned,* I guess. Starlings flew onto the manicured grass and found grubs. I dug up some sod and found more. (The sod-turning was not just scientifically-motivated. It was also preparatory to helping put in a few vegetables.) These June-buggish creatures appeared to be the sort that lived on grass roots and which humans kill with all sorts of nasty toxins.

Squirrels, some grey and some cast-iron, descended from their stick-nest in a mature spruce tree and dug out all the carefully-planted lobelias in the flower boxes. Too large to get into the house sparrows' nesting boxes, they still drove the worried sparrow-parents into paroxysms of *chirrrrrrp*-ing.

The bird bath at the rear of the yard attracted chick-worn robins, iridescent grackles, and a reclusive wood thrush that found neglected landscape shrubs as good as wild ones for nesting purposes.

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Gerard Manley Hopkins noted it is possible to "glean our Saviour" from looking around at harvest time; and that "these things were here, but the beholder/ Wanting."

I could say the same about suburban Hamilton, Ontario. The beauty – human and animal – is there. Not exactly a wilderness, but enough to bring forth an "alleluia" or two from anyone wishing to behold.

Curt Gesch is a retired teacher living in Telkwa, BC. and currently visiting family in Hamilton , Ontario

Leading from brokenness

Paul Carlisle

How could I be depressed? I was a pastor, seminary professor, and professional counselor. I believed I was immune to the despairing grasp of clinical depression. So when it placed its icy fingers around my life I was shocked! I could not shake it no matter how much Bible reading and prayer I engaged in. I was not sure I would survive my bout with the *beast*.

I know many other pastors and Christian leaders have or will encounter this type of brokenness. Remember, you are not the first one to travel this dark and precarious path. But I survived and would like to serve as your guide and companion on the journey from despair to deliverance to joy. Let me begin by telling you my story:

In the summer of 1994 I was finishing up a summer vacation when I got the news that my dad had died in delirium tremens. He was unable to get the alcohol his body craved, resulting in a massive heart attack that took his life instantly. I was shocked and numb.

I flew to Texas and performed my dad's funeral then returned to my family in North Carolina. All I remember about those days was being deeply fatigued and profoundly exhausted. I continued to prepare messages for the church and prepare for the next semester of teaching at seminary. I was not ready for what was about to take place.

One morning, without warning, I fell to the kitchen floor in front of my wife. I was felled by a pain I'd never known. I was light-headed and disoriented. I couldn't concentrate. I felt like someone had unplugged my brain. Hope suddenly drained from my body and darkness slowly enveloped me to the point of suffocation. Anxiety fastened itself to me as a permanent partner. I didn't know it at the time, but I'd come perilously near an incapacitating emotional and mental breakdown.

Depression is an invisible cancer that slowly drains your will to live. It leaves you stripped of heart and hope. Happiness is replaced with horror. For me anxiety racked my body and mind to the point that death would've been welcomed. I dreaded bedtime because I was doomed to lie in the bed watching the clock at 30-minute intervals as terror stalked me until dawn. I would awake unsure if I could survive the day. Often I would experience such fear and panic upon waking that all I could do was embrace my wife Terri and sob uncontrollably with groans that I did not understand.

Where was God? I cried out and cried out; yet my heavenly Father was silent. A growing fear of betrayal and abandonment gripped my heart. Never had I known such aloneness. The fear of losing God would literally cause my body to shake and tremble. I could not understand what was happening to me.

If I could have run away I would have. I was sure that this would provide no relief. Yet – when the despair would mount a heightened attack – I would get in my pickup and drive for half an hour or so hoping to distance myself from the darkness.

Self-hate assaulted me daily. I felt like such a wretch of a person, unworthy of anything good. I could not free myself from the thought that my Dad's death was somehow my fault. My mind was sure that it was alcohol and Dad's poor choices that killed him, yet something inside continued to point an accusing finger at me. I reasoned that I was a minister, a seminary professor, and a professional counselor and surely that should have been enough equipment to enable me to rescue dad.... It was not.

I was beginning to think that I would never be back to normal. I could not remember the last time I laughed or felt peaceful. My body had taken about all it could. I was losing hope that there would ever be a way out.

How brokenness impacted my ministry

I thought I would have to leave the ministry because I was nearly debilitated mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I prepared sermons and class lectures only with the greatest effort. Meeting with people, which had been a real joy earlier, I now dreaded. I knew I had nothing to offer them. How could I save anyone from drowning when I was sinking myself? What if they could see through my thin veneer of "okayness?" I prayed that it would not happen but feared that it would.

The physical exhaustion was with me all day and night. I was sure that others could see that I was not doing my job adequately. Questions overwhelmed me: Would others see my tiredness and complain? Would they understand why my energy is depleted? Would they think I am lazy or crazy? Would I lose my job? These ideas plagued me constantly.

The worst part of the depression and brokenness was the spiritual doubts that swarmed me incessantly – like a hundred mosquitoes. I was helpless to fend them off. No matter what I tried to do I would hear these dark phrases: "God will not help you." "God has gone." "You are not a Christian." "God does not exist." "Maybe God is not good and loving." "God is hurting you." Facing these thoughts left me with very little desire to tell others about our marvelous God. The spiritual and emotional doubt was destroying my hold on the only anchor in my life – God! The result was spiritual paralysis. The alternative to admitting my doubt and paralysis was to fake it – and at this point I did not have the physical energy to be phony. I learned to be real because I had no other choice. Desperation gave birth to authenticity.

The path of healing

Praise our magnificent Savior for "severe mercy!" What I discovered is brokenness is

purposeful and seasonal. By purposeful I mean brokenness invites us to a deeper and richer intimacy with Christ.

Seasonal means that it has a beginning and an end. Thank you Jesus for brokenness having a completion point. Here is the way God brought me through the darkness:

1. Medical help was essential to my healing. My family physician, a former missionary doctor, tried to treat the depression with medication but was unsuccessful. He referred me to a Christian psychiatrist who had expertise with my malady. I felt tremendous shame that I was so weak and broken that I had to be treated by a psychiatrist. Prescribed medications finally broke the insomnia cycle, quieted the anxiety, and enabled me to think again. At this juncture I was able to begin the hard work of healing brokenness as a result of childhood experiences of physical abuse. But medications alone were not enough to heal my broken and damaged heart.

2. Friends who support – God graciously provided me with four friends to walk with me through the darkness (two pastors, a friend from seminary, and a lay person). I cannot tell you how important these people were to my being able to successfully navigate the rough waters of darkness to the Light. The most significant thing they did for me was "be present." Being present seems like a simple gift, until you need that gift.

These four friends of mine along with my wife and a faithful psychiatrist did a courageous thing, they jumped in the dangerous waters, swam out to me, and held on. This allowed me to have some sense of stability and hope. Their actions communicated, "We are here and we won't leave you." It was awesome! My faith was beginning to be reactivated.

Besides intimate friends, my wife Terri played a major role in my healing. Her love and support for me were never so obvious as when I was in the darkness. She held onto God with one hand and me with the other. I know she had great trouble understanding just what was happening to me but she never once stopped believing God would bring us through.

My heavenly Father was doing a marvelous work in my life that was far beyond my feeble comprehension and understanding. He was tearing down and destroying so he could plant and build (Jeremiah 1). The problem was that all I could see was the "tearing down" part. I felt at times like he was killing me. I had no way of knowing that he was about to do a magnificent work in my life. My depression showed how much I tried to *control* everything in my life. I could talk of trusting God but in reality I only trusted myself. Believing in a kingdom that was bigger than mine was slow in coming, but I was taking some baby steps.

I wrestled with the depression for the better part of two years. This was the most difficult time I had ever known in my spiritual journey. Yet, the brokenness gave birth to a dynamic and rich relationship with God that I had never before experienced. Never in my wildest dreams had I known that Christ could provide such peace, security, purpose, and confidence. The barren land of brokenness was the door to unfathomable intimacy with God.

Practical helps

The brokenness forced me to change my frantic pace of life. If you could have seen how busy I was, you would have thought I believed the Bible said, "Be hyper and know that I am God." I had replaced intimacy with God with frenzied activity. Imitating Martha came natural but the ways of Mary were foreign to me (Luke 10).

Why must I do this?

To get a handle on my fast-paced life style, I began to have people whom I trusted look at my calendar to see if I was overloading. This was really helpful. Before adding something to my calendar I would ask myself, "Why I must do this?" This helped me uncover the fear of rejection that drove me to do more and more. I chose to learn the way of stillness and solitude with God. The lessons of stillness God taught me the importance of letting others minister to me.

Let me offer you some suggestions on establishing soul-mate intimacy. First, ask God to provide intimates that will love you with all their heart. This type of relationship needs to be initiated and maintained by the Spirit of God.

Second, approach those that are presently available and see if you sense any type of openness to a deepening relationship with

Continued on p. 15

Every stump tells a story

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

The other day I was cutting the grass for the second time in one week. As I drove around various stumps, I thought back on how many trees we've planted and subsequently lost over the years. You know you've been in one place for a long time when you've not only planted a couple hundred trees, but you've seen them mature and, in some cases, become firewood. More precisely, I'd have to say that Jack did most of the actual planting. My role leans toward "artistic director."

When we first came here, nearly thirty years ago, a white picket fence surrounded the little farmhouse and a colorful perennial flowerbed bordered three sides. A pair of huge walnut trees stood guarding the property, one in the front yard and one in the back, along with an elegant white birch that seemed to welcome visitors from its spot in the corner of the yard. Stately maple trees lined the side road and one side of the lane.

We were young and busy. I worked full time in the office of the nursing home in town. Jack had a part time job doing maintenance on Wellington County school buses, often filling in for regular drivers who needed time off. Meanwhile, much of the farm work was done by hand. Eventually we dismantled the pickets and put up a maintenance free cedar rail fence. The flowerbed was seeded down with grass. We did well to keep the extensive lawn trimmed, but we did enjoy the trees. Our hearts broke when some kind of bug invaded the birch and it splintered after an ice storm. Still, there wasn't much time or money for landscaping.

The first trees Jack planted were cedars he dug out from our bush at the back of the farm. Most of them remain to this day, forming a thick windbreak behind the barn, providing homes to innumerable birds and bunny rabbits. Around that time he also planted a row of poplars between us and the Massey Ferguson dealer next door, backed up with yet another row of cedars to obliterate the view of old combines and tractors and block some of the noise from the repair shop. The cedars grew rapidly, but the poplars skyrocketed. After several years he cut down the poplars and planted spruce trees in their place. We now have an impenetrable evergreen forest along that property line.

The landscaping began in earnest in 1988, after we replaced the crumbling 135 year-old house with a new four level side-split. Since then we've planted a variety of evergreens, maples and more maples (Jack's favorite), and more than a few ornamental shrubs, many of which became overgrown and had to be removed and replaced. Several of the original maples down the lane were old and rotten, while some of the younger trees would occasionally break in stormy winds or lose their symmetry to a lightning bolt.

Some losses stand out more than others. On my fortieth birthday we ate cake and drank coffee in the shade of the big walnut tree in our backyard. A week or so later it snapped in half in the middle of the night, missing a rented camper by inches as it fell. Watching Jack and James chop that giant into little pieces gave me pause to consider my own mortality. Its trunk was wide, the roots ran deep and the leaves were full and healthy looking. I thought it would always be there. I felt as if I had lost an old friend – a grim reminder that nothing lasts forever. Nothing that belongs to this world, anyway. To this day the grass grows a little thicker where that tree stood, and every summer a proliferation of mushrooms marks its place.

Last July a storm took out the weeping birch we had in our front yard. I remember bringing that tree home in the fall about fifteen years ago. I got it on sale – a mere twig with a couple of random leaves. Jack laughed at my "bargain," but stuck it in the ground anyway. I wondered if it would actually come to life in the spring. It did. And it grew into a gracefully tall tree that filtered the morning light into our living room for many years. Tossing its branches onto the wagon I wanted to complain, Jonah-like, to God for taking away "my" tree. It was a favorite backdrop for photos, so at least I have several pictures of it in the family albums.

The latest casualty is a soft maple that shaded our kitchen window. Two years ago its leaves never fully developed. Last summer it became clear that something was seriously wrong with it. This year the chainsaw came out. Jack was miserable about bringing it down, but there was nothing else to be done. All that's left of it now is a stump soon to be mulched up.

To console himself he went off on a shopping trip to our favorite tree farm. So far this year he's planted a pear tree, a willow and 75 new cedars. There's a Japanese lilac on the way to fill in the maple tree's space and a half dozen new birches for the front yard. No wonder his Tylenol supply is diminishing.

One morning he stared out the window, admiring the Crimson King maples, his pride and joy. "You know, we still have a lot of really nice trees on this farm. It's a beautiful place," he said. He's right. The older I get, the more I realize that even the trees are God ordained – meant to be appreciated, never taken for granted, and never seen as something we have a right to.

"Boompje groot, venntje dood," goes the Dutch saying. (Roughly translated: Big trees, dead men.) Well, I hope not. But I do know that by the time this year's plantings are full grown, Jack and I may not even live here anymore. That's okay. Someone else will enjoy them. In the meantime, I'll have the pleasure of watching them grow. That's how it is, isn't it? We stand and watch with eager anticipation as time flies quickly by. Then we wonder where it went, and sometimes lament its passing. But it's all part of life. And every stump tells a story of its own.

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Worship

The whole earth is full of his glory: the recovery of authentic worship

Albert Mohler

Surveying the literature on worship currently being published, and listening to the conversations currently taking place among the churches, one can quickly discern that worship is now one of the most controversial issues in the local congregation. As a matter of fact, many current book titles in the evangelical world suggest that what the church faces today is "worship warfare." The very combination of the words "worship" and "war" should lead us to very sincere and sober biblical reflection. What is worship? And what does God desire that we should do in worship?

The symptoms of the current confusion over worship are seen in the fact that now many believe some modifier or adjective must be appended to the word "worship" in order to indicate what will take place. Traditional worship, liturgical worship, contemporary worship, blended worship, seeker-sensitive worship, praise and worship!

But what in the world is worship?

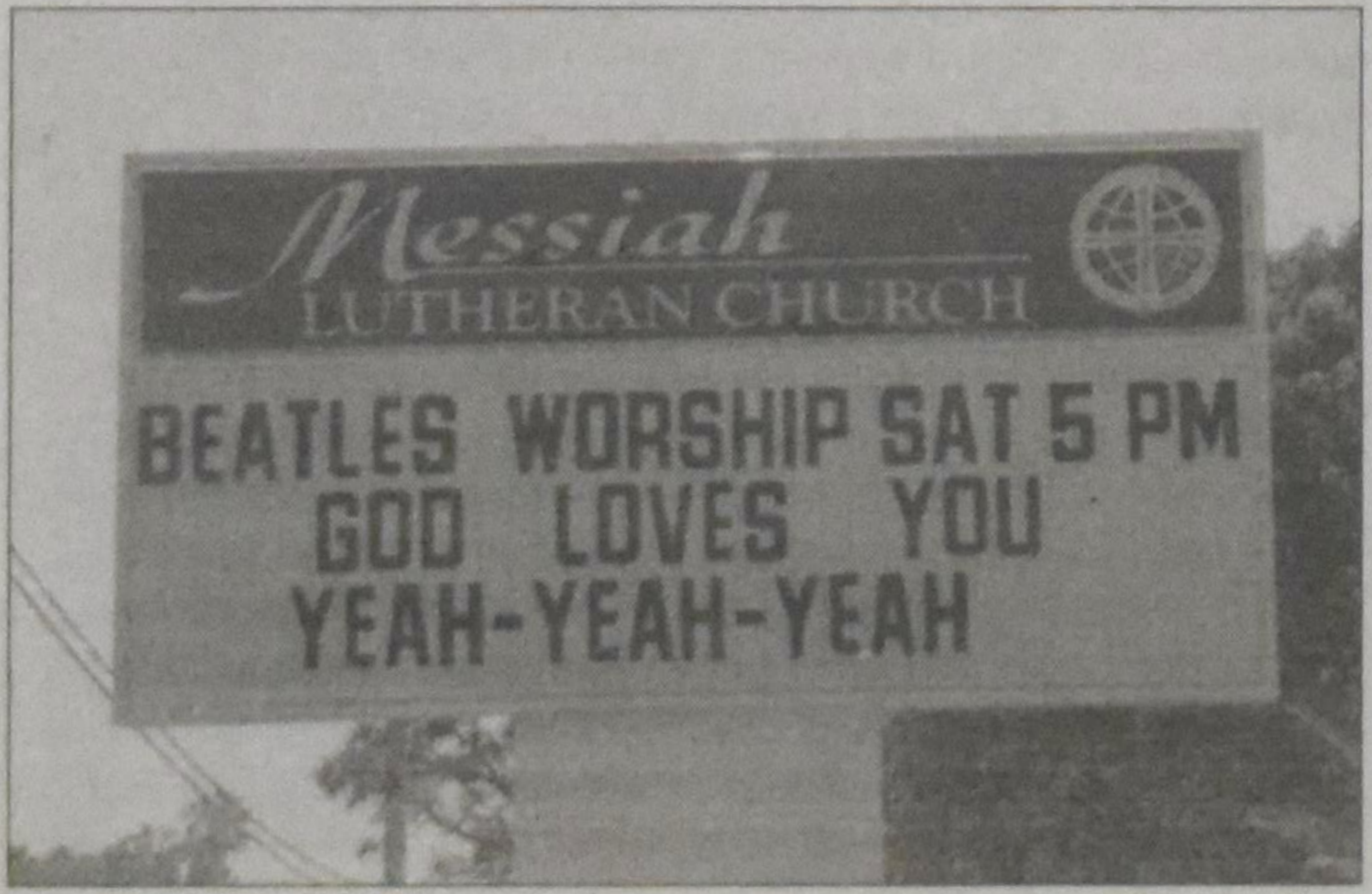
It is true that worship has led to some warfare. In local congregations we see not only confusion, but also fighting, controversy and splitting. And what is the meaning of all of this? Jack Hayford, one of the nation's most eloquent proponents of "renewal worship," suggests that nothing less than a new reformation is taking place. The reformation of the sixteenth century was a reformation of doctrine. It was a necessary reformation as biblical truth was recovered. But he says we are experiencing in this generation a reformation in worship that is just as necessary and just as historic.

My concern is that the issue of worship will define not only our church services, but also our theology and our beliefs about God. There is no more important issue for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ than that we worship as God would have us to worship him.

Geoffrey Wainwright of Duke University reminds us that theology and worship are inextricably linked. Setting the context of missions as primary, he entitled his systematic project Doxology. We should be reminded that the purpose of the theologian is to serve the church so that the people of God worship him more faithfully. By understanding God's revelation in his Word we know how he would wish to be worshiped. The Lord himself reminded us that God seeks those worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23). But what does it mean to worship God in spirit? What does it mean to worship him in truth?

Theology is by definition not an ivory tower discipline. It is not merely a form of academic discourse. When rightly conducted, theology is the conversation of the people of God seeking to understand the Lord whom we worship and how he wills to be worshiped. So, we might ask in that light, what are the proper conditions of evangelical worship? What is the pattern for worship among those persons who claim to be established in the gospel and submitted to the Word of God?

We know the history of worship through the ages. We know what took place in the Reformation. We know what transpired in the English reforms. We know what took place as features were stripped away that were considered to be unbiblical – and yet we see these same things returning. What is the condition of evangelical worship? It is not an exaggeration to suggest words such as pandemonium, confusion, and consternation.



In the midst of the upheaval, there is a great deal of encouragement to be found from reading the late A.W. Tozer. This is what he said some decades ago: "We have the breezy, self-confident Christians with little affinity for Christ and His cross. We have the joy-bell boys that can bounce out there and look as much like a game show host as possible. Yet, they are doing it for Jesus' sake?! The hypocrites! They're not doing it for Jesus' sake at all; they are doing it in their own carnal flesh and are using the church as a theater because they haven't yet reached the place where the legitimate theater would take them.

Tozer takes his argument further: "It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people, a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend the meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with Him for they must be wooed to meeting with a stick of striped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments."

This has influenced the whole pattern of church life and even brought into being a new type of church architecture designed to house the golden calf. So we have the strange anomaly of orthodoxy in creed and heterodoxy in practice. The striped candy technique has so fully integrated into our present religious thinking that it is simply taken for granted. Its victims never dream that it is not a part of teachings of Christ and his apostles. Any objection to the carryings-on of our present gold calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, "But we are winning them." And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross-carrying? To self-denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To a despising of the world's treasures? To hard self-discipline? To love for God? To total commitment to Christ?

Of course, the answer to all of these questions is "no." As these words were written several decades ago, Tozer certainly saw the future. But there are contemporary witnesses as well.

Kent Hughes, who is Senior Pastor of the College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, has written perceptively on this issue. Hughes put it this way: "The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today's Christendom is that worship is primarily for us – to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus – preaching to felt needs – man's conscious agenda instead of God's. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attender uncomfortable is removed from the service…. Taken to the nth degree, this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects man. This terribly corrupts one's theology."

Hughes is right. Our confused worship corrupts our theology and our weak theology corrupts our worship. Are these voices alarmist? They do mean to sound an alarm. But there are others who are saying, "Don't worry – be happy – go worship." One recent church growth author has written, "Worship is like a car to get us from where we are to where God wants us to be. Transportation and communication are imperative; the mode or vehicle is not imperative. Some worship God in cathedrals with the rich traditional organ tomes of Bach and Faure from the classics of Europe. They travel in a Mercedes Benz. Some worship God in simple wooden churches with a steeple pointing heavenward. They sing the gospel songs of Charles Wesley or Fanny Cosby. They travel in a Ford or Chevy. Some worship God with the contemporary sounds of praise music with a gentle beat. They travel in a convertible sports coupe. Some worship God to the whine of a guitar and the amplifiers to the max. They travel on a motorcycle, without a muffler."

But surely there is more to worship than the spectrum of taste from a Mercedes Benz to a motorcycle. There must be something weightier here. "Worship is like a car to get us from where we are to where God wants us to be." Can that be said with a straight face as we listen to the Scripture speak of worship? We know from the onset that there are many different Christian opinions concerning worship. This does not come to us as news.

Reading the Bible as nourishment for life

Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading
Eugene H. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006)
Reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

As a pastor and professor, Eugene Peterson was distressed by the fact that the way members of his congregation and his students read the Bible "didn't seem to be any different from the way they read the sports page, or the comic strips, or the want ads." He desired to get them "involved in right reading of Scripture."

Peterson encountered an arresting metaphor for reading Scripture in Revelation 10: 9-10 where John writes, "I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, 'Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.' And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter."

Instead of reading the scroll, John ate it. Peterson explains the repercussions of the metaphor in this way: "Reading is an immense gift, but only if the words are assimilated, taken into the soul – eaten, chewed, gnawed, received in unhurried delight. Words of men and women long dead, or separated by miles and\or years, come off the page and enter our lives freshly and precisely, conveying truth and beauty and goodness, words that God's spirit has used and uses to breathe life into our souls."

Peterson urges readers to assimilate the metaphor and its implications into their lives by accepting it as the command that it is. He wants the command "eat this book" to take "an honored place in the company of great gospel commands that are clustered in the forefront of awareness among all who follow Jesus." The command is not merely to read the Bible, but to eat this book.

How is the act of eating Holy Scripture different from merely reading it? Peterson points out that most students have been taught to read objectively, to look at the meaning of words so that truth can be preserved, whether that be scientific, theological, or other truth. But the act of eating the book is different because it involves taking it into ourselves. He further explains this by pointing out that the angel doesn't command John to pass on facts about God. Rather, he commands him "to assimilate the word of God so that when he does speak, it will express itself artlessly in his syntax just as the food we eat, when we are healthy, is unconsciously assimilated into our nerves and muscles and put to work in speech and action." The most important thing readers of the Bible need to know, according to Peterson, is that God is a "rich, alive, personally revealing God" who enters our circumstances, no matter who we are or where we are. Because he is a personal God, we are invited to personally participate in the text he has given us.

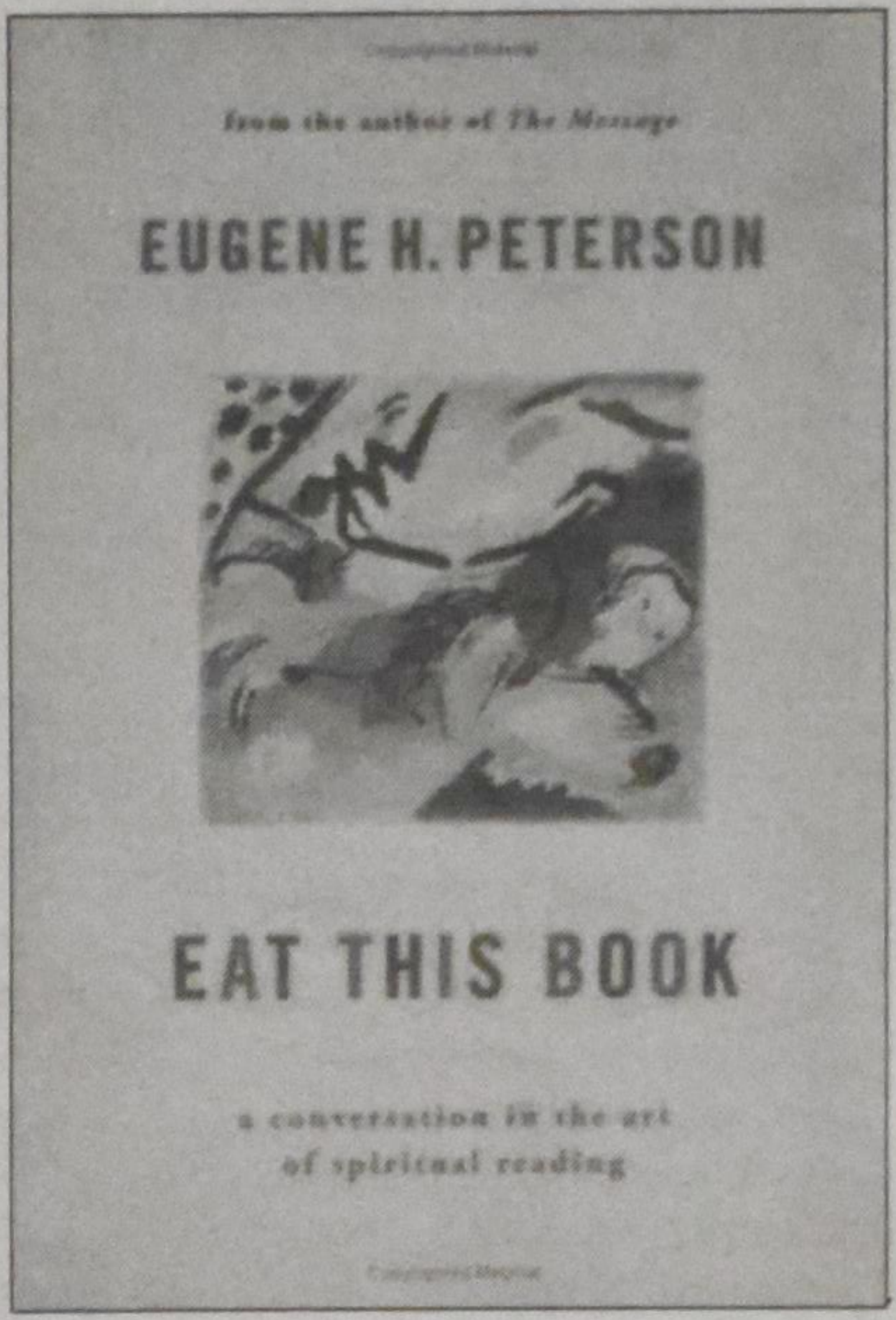
However, sometimes Christians read the Bible in ways that depersonalize the text. Peterson points out three different ways in which this occurs: some Christians read it solely because they are interested in the "intellectual challenges posed by the Bible," others read it for sound counsel and moral advice, and still others read it only for inspiration.

Though Peterson doesn't severely criticize each way of reading the Bible, he points out that the inadequacy of each approach is rooted in using the Bible for its own purposes. This means that "it is entirely possible to come to the Bible in total sincerity, responding to the intellectual challenge it gives, or for the moral guidance it offers, or for the spiritual uplift it provides, and not in any way have to deal with a personally revealing God who has personal designs on you."

To show readers how they can participate in the biblical text, be transformed by it, and be drawn into a relationship with the living God, Peterson defines *lectio divina*, a discipline handed down from our Christian ancestors. It is "not just a skill that we exercise when we have a Bible open before us but a life congruent with the Word made flesh to which the Scriptures give witness."

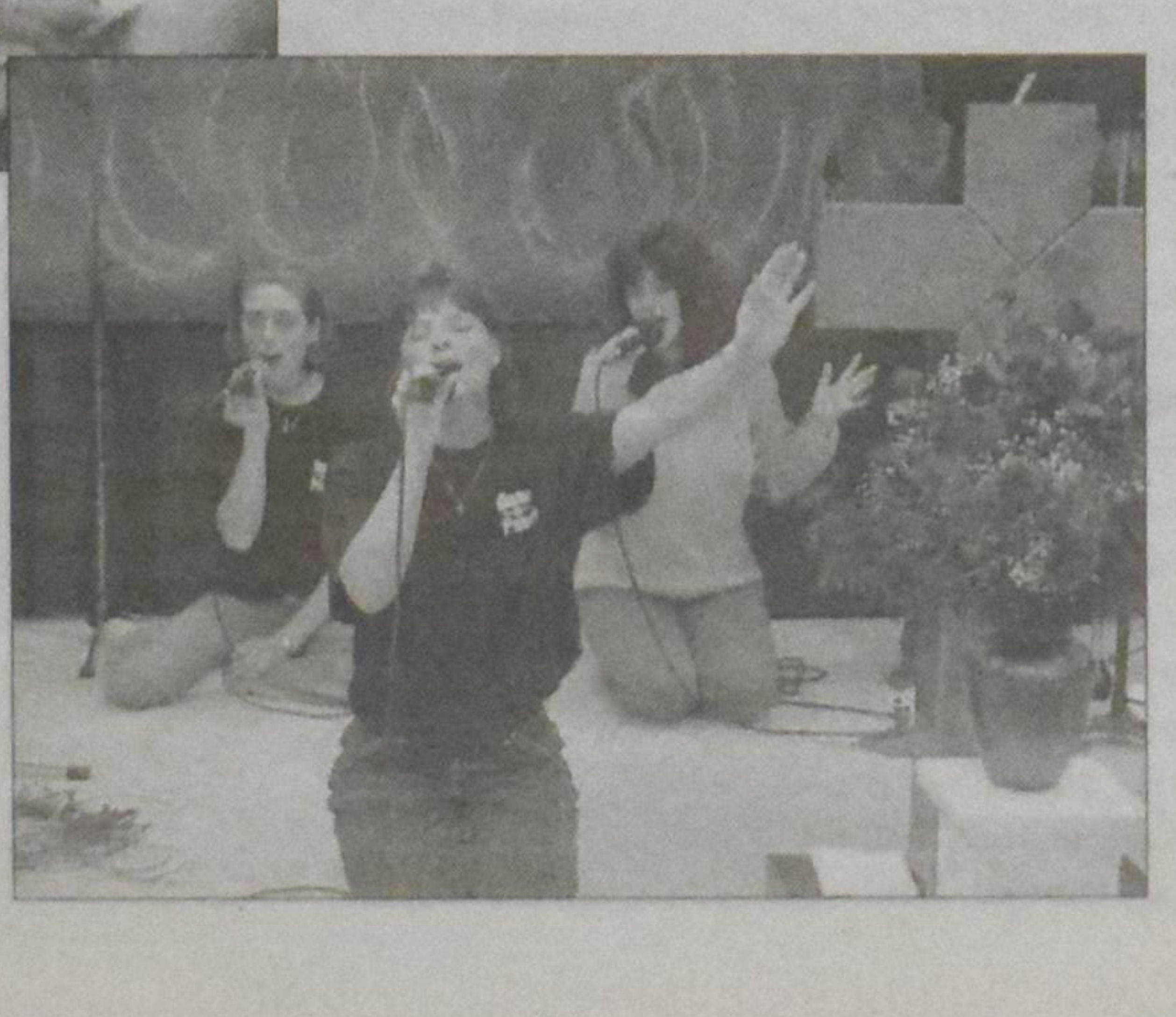
Lectio divina comprises four elements: *lectio* (reading the text), *meditatio* (meditating the text), *oratio* (praying the text), and *contemplatio* (living the text). This is not a linear process, but is "more like a looping spiral in which all four elements are repeated, but in various sequences and configurations."

Throughout history, people have been able to hear or read the Scriptures because of the myriad translations that exist. Peterson explores the process of the translation of the word of God into Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and finally into his American translation, *The Message*. Readers will be intrigued by the way God led Peterson to translate the Bible in such a way that it speaks to today's generation.



In *Eat This Book*, this reader discovered a marvelous metaphorical insight into how to read God's word. Peterson's love for Holy Scripture and his desire to see people transformed by it ignited in me a deeper longing to read the Bible rightly and to be attentive to God's word.

Authentic worship ....*continued from p. 12*



But the real issue for us is whether or not God himself has an opinion on this issue. Does God care how he is worshiped? Or is he some kind of laissez-faire deity who cares not how his people worship him, but is resting in the hopes that some people in some place will in some way worship him?

Scripture reveals that God does care. Leviticus 10:1-3 serves as a witness to this point. "Now Nadad and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the Lord spoke, saying, 'By those who come near me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.'"

These were Aaron's sons. But they did what God had not commanded them to do in worship. They brought strange fire to the altar and they were consumed. Clearly, God does have an opinion about worship. He is the God whom we have come to know in Jesus Christ, the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. He is a jealous God – a God who loves us and is calling out a people but a God who instructs and commands his people that we should worship him rightly.

In one sense, I think you can say looking throughout the Bible that there has been worship warfare even in the Scripture itself. As a matter of fact, I think you can look back to the very first murder and see that it had to do with worship as well. What is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord? Cain and Abel saw this issue differently.

Well, Scripture makes clear that worship is something that we do, not just something we attend. It is not merely an issue for the pastor and other ministers. It is not just an issue for the musicians and those who will plan the service. It is an issue for the entire congregation, for worship is something we do together. It is our corporate and common responsibility to worship God as he desires.

Where shall we turn for instruction on how we ought to worship? There is only one place we can turn, and that is to the Word of God. The norm of our worship must be the Word of God – this Word that he has spoken. As we turn to this Word, we do see a pattern of worship, a pattern that is replicated throughout the fabric of Scripture from beginning to the end.

This is part one of a three-part series. Next: Authentic worship begins with a true vision of the living God.

Dr. Mohler is a theologian and an ordained minister, having served as pastor and staff minister of several Southern Baptist churches. He came to the presidency of Southern Seminary from service as editor of The Christian Index, the oldest of the state papers serving the Southern Baptist Convention.

God wants us to enjoy ourselves

Be happy, young man, while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart
and whatever your eyes see,
but know that for all these things God
will bring you to judgment.

Ecclesiastes 11:9

A. A. van Ruler

This verse speaks of the possibility of human joy and happiness. Joy is actually implanted in the whole of creation. The shining sun, the blooming flowers, the singing birds, the romping dogs – everything seems to be an expression of existence rejoicing in itself. All these things give the impression that it is true – part of reality itself – that being is good and that it is better than non-being.

When it comes to human beings, however, there's a difference. Things are more passionate, more intense. This is because with us, there is also self-consciousness.

We don't just rejoice, we also feel our rejoicing and have knowledge of it. I'm almost tempted to seek the uniqueness of human joy not just in this self-awareness but (in a manner of speaking) in its expression in deeds. For human beings, joy is not only a matter of being but also of doing. So we can also be admonished, called and urged to be joyful.

Once you begin to look for it, you'll be surprised by how often the Bible speaks of joy. Joy seems to be what we're destined for. It is for the joy of mankind that God performs his mighty deeds in Israel and in Christ.

We may even go a step further and say that God rejoices with us. He takes joy in our joy. Perhaps we may risk one step further and say that joy is the inner being of God, even more so than love.

The answer to the question what joy is all about is really not very hard to find. Our text points unambiguously to that which our eyes behold: joy is about the objective world before us. It was called into existence by God. It is his handiwork. It is good and it is beautiful. To behold this world is a cause for joy.

Each of us carries this awareness from the halcyon days of our youth. After we are born, gradually our eyes open. The eyes of a child are big and bright. They radiate enchantment. The whole world pours in through those big eyes.

We have all traveled a wondrous journey of discovery. We were like Alice in Wonderland, passing from one experience of wonder to another. Later in life, we often look back in longing to that time when the world was still wholly a new revelation to us.

But it isn't just a matter of our eyes and of the world they behold. The Preacher also brings in the other pole – the way or inclinations of the heart. These come from inside. We must also be receptive to the goodness and beauty of the world and of life. We are not made happy in a purely objective way. We must also want to be happy. There isn't just the eye; there is also the heart. Besides the world that we behold, there are also the inclinations of the heart that stir us. It isn't just that the world enchants the heart. The obverse is also true: the heart enchants the world.

But isn't all this far too sunny and optimistic? Is there really so much enchantment in the world for our eyes to see? Isn't there also much that is repugnant and horrifying? Isn't there an awful lot of misery? Doesn't the world eventually make you tired and sad? Or should we say – with the Buddhists – that, though things are enchanting to see, it is terrible to be?

There is not a great deal to be said to counter such objections. If the heart is not willing, we will lose the world.

Winslow Homer painting Crack the whip

But I have been deeply impressed by something Simone Weil said. During the war she suffered immeasurably, but she said, "One of the most important ways for us to God is through the beauty of the world."

Such an assertion is, of course, a faith choice. It derives from Israel, and Simone Weil had Jewish roots. But it is also possible that inwardly this faith choice springs from the very nature of the matter, clearly and self-evidently. For don't we all feel the truth of the assertion that being is better than non-being? Can a person genuinely wish that he'd never even existed?

The Preacher has no doubts on this score. He sees the darkness in existence very clearly, but he clings to the fact that reality is real and that it is an inexhaustible source of enchantment. What the heart desires and what the eye sees is – reality! And it is good and beautiful. We can rejoice in it.

However, the Preacher encounters another problem. He urges the young to be happy. That's the time to enjoy yourself – in your youth. Later on it gets trickier. Life becomes more serious, and often more burdensome. It is precisely the seriousness of life (among other things) that makes it more burdensome. We become overly familiar with what our eyes behold, and sometimes it seems as if we become bored by it all. The world becomes less of a revelation, and we lose our sense of wonder. We become increasingly businesslike. Our hearts grow dim. The fire goes out of our lifelust for the world.

All of this is also part of becoming mature and older. To really rejoice in the world demands a certain amount of energy; in fact, it demands a great deal of energy to remain enthusiastic about things. The batteries of your heart need to be fully charged for us to have a zeal for life. And it seems as though that battery gradually runs down.

But the Preacher isn't talking about how we ought to approach maturity and age; he is only making observations. He notes that youth is the best time to fully drink in and enjoy created reality. It is a time when we still have the energy to enjoy it fully.

It is true that youth also has its problems. Children can be sad. And then there are the teenage years with their Weltschmerz (alienation). But the wonder of it is that the heart does break through it all, and once again the world returns to us in all its allure. We must take advantage of that time. Those who are young should be young: they must rejoice and be happy. They must follow the ways of their hearts. They must also follow what the eyes behold.

Why is this so important that the Preacher emphasizes it as he does? We might say, Well, because the time is short, and before you know it, it is past. We might also say, Well, because this is what we're destined for – for the happiness of youth: we carry it with us as a precious gift to the time of our death, even if only as a memory and yearning.

Our text, however, contains yet another motive: one day God will bring us to judgment for all these things.

The exegetes have very different opinions about how to translate the beginning of this clause. Should we read it to say, "...but know...," or should we read it "...for know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment"? In my opinion, it really doesn't make a huge difference. In either case, it means that our Creator is deeply interested in whether and how in time we savor the reality he has created for us.

If we translate "...but know...," the emphasis falls on enjoying the world in the right way, that is, in harmony with God's will and not in any old way. If we translate "..for know...," the emphasis falls above all on the fact that no matter what, the world is there to be enjoyed because this is how we truly praise our Creator.

We must add, I think, that the gospel completes the Preacher's reflections. The Preacher tells us to enjoy God's creation in the days of our youth. The gospel says we must be healed of our old age and we must become as children. Remember, there is the resurrection of the dead and Christ's victory over death.

Conversion and rebirth mean that we take a stance in life that crawls through all suffering and darkness to return to creation itself. We are liberated from evil – in all its forms. We are liberated from sin, from death and from meaninglessness. In the end, we are left with liberated being, and this can only bring us joy. So even more than in the Old, in the New Testament the word "joy" sets the fundamental tone.

Music and worship: it's about time to get real

John McNeil

CHRISTCHURCH ,NZ (ANS) – British Singer-songwriter Graham Kendrick – composer of such classics as "Shine Jesus Shine" and "The Servant King" – has just toured New Zealand with American preacher Tony Campolo on behalf of TEAR Fund. In this interview he says we need to bring the reality of human struggle into our worship, and move away from song-driven services.

Kendrick: Broadly speaking, the new wave of praise and worship, which I have been a part of, has tended to emphasise the positive. Those who criticise it would say that in many ways it's triumphalist, and there is an element of truth in that. We are singing songs as if everything's wonderful; because we have Jesus, life is perfect. Of course, that's not reality.

The danger is that we deny suffering and struggle, which of course the scriptures never do. I am not in any way denying the victory that there is in the Christian life, but often the victory comes through suffering. If you look at the life of the apostle Paul, he experienced tremendous suffering and privation in the cause of the Gospel, and he didn't expect to be delivered from it.

We have to find a balance in the Christian faith, and often our worship songs define our thinking. Some would claim that worship songwriters are effectively today's theologians, for better or for worse, because people learn their theology from songs.

When you look at the psalms, it's not unreasonable to look at those as a touchstone of the balance of Christian worship, and they roughly divide into 50 per cent thanksgiving and 50 per cent laments, which sounds like life to me.

Challenge: Are you suggesting to songwriters it's about time they got real?

Kendrick: I think so. I think we need to write more about struggle. I admit that when you gather people for Sunday worship you don't want to immediately plunge into the difficulties and struggles. The answer is that we focus on God, who he is and what he has done. But we need the language of lament because there are times in a local community of believers when maybe someone is sick or has died or you're praying for someone to be healed and they were not healed. We need songs which give us the language of lament. There are far too few of them.

Challenge: Many songs major on intimacy, and are akin to spiritual ear-nibbling. We have been swamped with Hillsong.

Kendrick: We have certainly had an over-abundance of intimate songs, which have given the impression to many people that worship is about achieving some sense of personal fulfilment and well-being. Now I believe that God intends that when we worship him; we do find who we are and where we belong.

But the musical genre we have borrowed from the surrounding culture for worship songs is essentially the romantic pop song, the love song. They were never really designed to carry a great deal of content.

The genre tends to work better when you talk about how you feel. That's fine, and no doubt it's a part of our worship, but we desperately need songs which simply declare who God is, and what he has done, and also cover lots of the aspects of the life of the Christian community.

We need songs we can sing in the context of a baptism, or in being part of the body of Christ, for membership, or sending people out in mission, or serving the poor.

We need songs that tell us what God is like, that cover the same sort of territory as psalms like Psalm 113, which first of all describes God who is high and above the nations and looks down on the galaxies, and then all of a sudden this same God is down in the rubbish among the poor, giving the barren woman a home. There is a picture of God we really need to sing about.

Challenge: You have said previously that even when good songs are written on a neglected subject, if they don't fit the expected ethos or style of experiential worship, they get bumped off the song list.

Kendrick: We get locked into a narrow range of style. But I think a change is coming. In Britain I am part of a group that has been gathering influential songwriters once a year. It's beginning to unpack some of these issues.

In this sort of way, we are hoping to sow some seeds among the younger writers in particular, some fresh approaches.

Most Christian songwriters just reflect the Christian culture we are in. We don't always really examine it, or what we do. We need also to be poets in the sense that a poet is a kind of prophet critiquing the norms and assumptions that the Christian community makes.

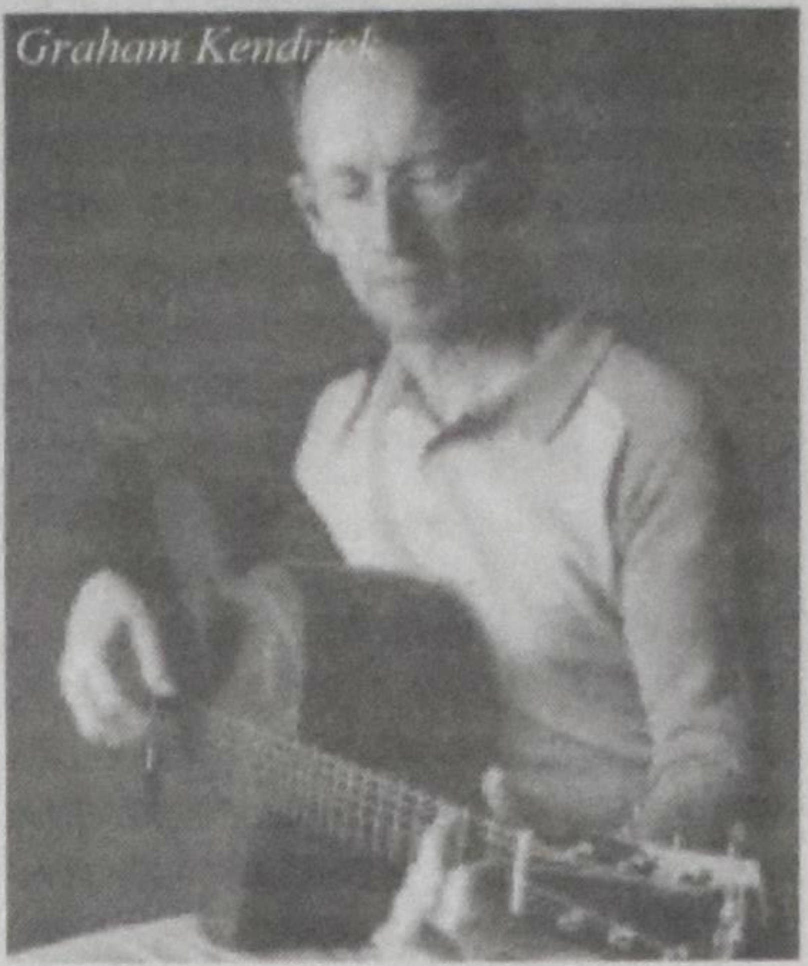
Challenge: What new trends do you see?

Kendrick: If anything, the trend is diversity, especially from the British point of view. There are an increasing number of people who are very dissatisfied with what you might call song-driven worship, where songs predominate and worship consists of 30 to 40 minutes of songs and then a sermon.

A lot of people are asking some very good questions, for instance about theology. Some are saying: 'Whatever happened to a Trinitarian understanding of worship?' It's never mentioned in our songs. There's a rich doctrine of worship in the book of Hebrews that is pretty much absent from our worship songs.

A lot of people are taking a fresh look at liturgy. I wasn't brought up with it, but I've learned to appreciate liturgy, the way it can be not only theologically precise but can take you on a journey of understanding and reorientation into relationship with God. If we just have a bunch of songs that are linked together more around the dynamics of the music rather than the content, we might get a good concert, but the journey of understanding that we have been taken on is pretty random, and often it's unresolved.

There's a shape to liturgy, whereas a lot of song-driven worship is shapeless and wanders around until you run out of energy, and then you sit down and do the next thing on the program.


Graham Kendrick

Challenge: To achieve that sense of journey, you need song and worship leaders who are trained. I fear a lot of worship leaders are either theologically illiterate or just not getting training.

Kendrick: That's true, because music has become so dominant it tends to be those with musical gifting who end up with the job of leading worship. That's good, but we need to train people in an understanding of what worship is and isn't. Otherwise the role model comes out of the performer giving a concert. That's great on some occasions, but it's not adequate for the life of the Christian community in the long term.

I always encourage church leaders not to delegate the music to someone, but to work together as a team. In my view, even the songs we use in the church ideally need to be chosen and agreed on by the leadership team. We should regard them as little packages of teaching, with their own emphasis.

We are all going to choose the songs we like, but whether those are the songs that will serve that congregation is another question entirely. One of the distinctives of the Christian community is that it ought to be varied, a place of coming together of age groups and people from different backgrounds and cultures. In that, there's a challenge for worship. If we want to help the whole congregation to worship, the worship leader isn't going to be able to default to their own preferred style.

John McNeil, a veteran of 40 years of newspaper and radio journalism, is South Island editor for Challenge Weekly, *New Zealand's non-denominational, independent national Christian newspaper.*

Brokenness *... continued from p. 11*

you. If you think the person is a possible candidate, be more direct about pursuing a friendship with them. It takes time to know if the person will be one with whom you can share your deepest fears and joys, so be patient.

Third, be yourself. A time of brokenness is not the time to act as if you are OK. Let the intimate friends see you as you really are. This will require a deep trust in God on your part, especially if you have never done this before.

Last, meet with the person regularly. I suggest weekly. This will allow the Spirit of God to deepen the friendship and minister consistently to your heart.

Leading from brokenness

Leading from brokenness is one of the most fulfilling experiences I have ever known. I no longer am dominated by a fear of rejection. The brokenness produced a security in Christ that is unshakeable. Gone is the fear of having to please the deacons, elders, president, or leader of the women's auxiliary. The fear has been replaced with an unimaginable sense of security and confidence in Christ.

The brokenness has taught me it is OK to be human. I can admit I really don't know it all. I relate better to my congregation and students because I can admit and accept my limits. I find that parishioners and students are attracted to my honesty. It's a tremendous relief to not "fake" spiritual vitality. Another benefit of owning my humanity is being empowered with the empathy of Christ. Helping others is becoming more joyful day by day.

The brokenness has convinced me of God's faithful presence. I no longer have to make myself believe God; I really do! This is still a bit of a mystery to me. Gone are the days of having to tell myself that God is faithful and that he really does love me. I am certain of this from the tip of my head to the end of my big toe.

The brokenness has introduced me to God's "easy yoke" and "light burden." I know what it means to be yoked with him in ministry. I am "learning of him". This is a life-long process or journey.

Paul Carlisle is a professor at Midwestern seminary and author of "Strength for the Journey: A Biblical Perspective on Depression and Discouragement" (Lifeway, 1999) and "With All Your Heart: God's Design for Emotional Wellness" (LifeWay, 2000). This article originally appeared in Rick Warren's Ministry ToolBox.

Movie

When life piles up – learning from 'Away from Her'

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

Do not be over righteous, neither be over wise—why destroy yourself?
Eccl. 7:16

Somewhere in each of us we're a mixture of light and darkness, of love and of hate, of trust and of fear.
Jean Vanier

The leaves of memory seemed to make a mournful rustling in the dark.
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Liz Braun, the movie critic of Sun Media believes 'Away from Her' to be the kind of film that leaves people arguing in the parking lot long after they've left the theatre. She finds the film to be entirely character-driven, although with magnificent performances, but what it means is open to interpretations.

While my spouse and I were not arguing during dinner after the film, we were certainly dialoguing and were of different opinions in regards to various implications presented in the film. In the end we decided to 'agree to disagree.'

The film 'Away from Her' caused a stir at the Toronto Film Festival last year for several reasons. It dealt with a timely subject matter – aging and Alzheimer's – but also because it was beautifully filmed against the backdrop of a white snowy winter in Northern Ontario. Furthermore, the film was Sarah Polley's directing/writing debut – and an unusual mature subject matter considering she is a youthful 28 year old. Plus she was able to snare the glamorous and sensitive Julie Christie and the rugged and enigmatic Gordon Pinsent to play the two main characters.

On the surface, the film is about Grant and Fiona Andersson who have been married 44 years and aging gracefully while living snug as a bug in a cottage on a lake. Their fondness and desire for each other is enviable and while they are very different people, they share an interest in literature as well as the outdoors. Unfortunately, Fiona is in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's and as she struggles with memory loss the distant past is filtering in to take an unfinished place in their conversations as she makes subtle references to Grant's betrayals during his years as a college professor.

At a deeper level the film is a love story that has survived the joys and pains of 44 years of marriage and the life that piled up during that time. This is what caught the interest of Sarah Polley as she read Alice Munro's story *A Bear Comes Over The Mountain*, upon which the film is based. Usually, when film-makers want to re-energize a long standing marriage, they go back to the early romantic and breathless hormonal stages but Sarah wanted to embrace how spouses through time and diplomacy become devoted to one another in ways that inspires the human heart.

At the beginning of their marriage Grant took a while to grow up. Now, however, he believes Fiona to be his true love and in the last while he has reached a point in his life when his marriage could not be better. This makes watching Grant struggle with Fiona's illness all the more heart wrenching and poignant. After Fiona becomes lost in the woods, they begin to discuss whether she should go to a facility. He protests weakly that he has never 'been away from her.' However, when Fiona checks herself into Meadowlake, a facility with 'a lot of natural light and gleaming surfaces,' an environment in stark contrast to their snug and comfortable cottage, we feel as helpless and uncertain about her decision as Grant. Since the facility has a policy that loved ones of a new resident cannot visit for 30 days in order to help with transition, we are equally left in the dark as to how Fiona is doing, although there is a hint of her forming an attachment to a male resident.

When Grant is finally free to visit, he is thunder struck that she no longer recognizes him and is lavishing her affection onto Aubrey, a catatonic resident she believes to have known in her younger years. She tells her bewildered spouse, whom she now sees as visiting guest, "He doesn't confuse me at all." Still, he continues to visit her daily, sometimes only to observe Fiona's growing attachment to Aubrey. When Aubrey's wife returns from her holiday, however, she takes him out of Meadowlake. Soon Fiona spirals into a deep depression. All attempts by Grant to help her are in vain.

The film is a great example of Alice Munro's many layered stories that takes us to places we do not expect to travel. Yet it is a love story to which you can bring your own perspective and your own experiences. While not all marriages struggle with infidelity, other crisis can be equally destructive to the marital relationship. The term 'infidelity' simply means 'an unfaithful or disloyal act.' Most long-lasting marriages will have their own theme of infidelities, be they addictions, stoic indifference, emotional withdrawal, aggressions of all kinds, or withholding love and support. Ironically, these kinds of infidelities over time can do more damage than sexual infidelity that has been worked through resulting in a firmer commitment to the marriage. In any case, the film suggests unresolved issues may surface when the fragility of aging or disease sets in. In Fiona's case, she is unable to let go of the painful memories of Grant's earlier infidelities. When she is clear of mind, however, she sees him as a 'good man who had nothing to keep him tied to her (there were no children) yet chose not to forsake her.'

As Grant continues his daily visits, he connects with two women, Kristy, a friendly but brutally candid nurse and Marian, the wife of Aubrey, a pragmatic woman who has learned to take what life has to offer. Through these relationships Grant becomes aware he may always have been 'away from Fiona' in one way or another. But this time he is determined to make things work. And so, he embarks on a path to help her, possibly to bring her back to him or to prove he has finally come to a state of grace…or both.

In the end the film is a story of love and redemption. At the same time, the last scene between Grant and Fiona could be a reward for his selflessness, a slap in the face in terms of his sins, or another twist in a life without guarantees. Yet, the glimmer of hope in the film comes through Kristy as she challenges Grant with the proverb she spotted at a local church – it is never too late to become the person you might have been.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Pastors are like Elvis impersonators

Bob Zomermaand

Although Elvis Presley died 30 years ago, he lives on in the thousands upon thousands of Elvis impersonators all over the world. These are people who go to great lengths to look like, sound like, move like, and dress like Elvis. They want to lose their own personalities and become like the King of Rock and Roll. They are what I would call Disciples of the King. Their goal is to not only keep the legend of Elvis alive, but to get others to be like the King himself, just like they are.

If only Jesus were so fortunate!

In the pastorate today, we need more disciples of the Great King of the Universe. We need people who will do all they can to lose their own personalities and to be made in the image of Christ Jesus. In short, to be disciples of the Great King!

In the pastoral context I would put it this way: the more a pastor becomes like Jesus and lives like he did, the more that pastor will display excellence in his/her role. That excellence will be seen as others follow in the pastor's footsteps and, incredibly, more Disciples of the Great King are formed.

As I look back in history, I see many such individuals whose influence for the King is still felt today: Augustine in his many books, John Calvin in his commentaries, Mother Theresa in her life and writings – to name just a few. All of these are individuals whose writings have "discipled" other followers of Jesus over the centuries.

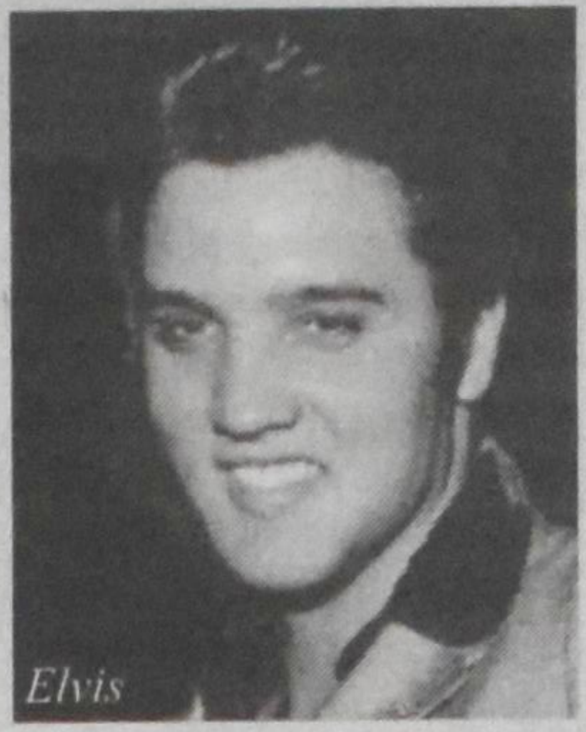
The giants in the faith have left us a splendid legacy. In their writings they speak to us, counsel us, and shape our ideas of faithfulness. They mold us into the image of Jesus. They remind us that we are not the first who are walking the life of discipleship. Pastors grow in their imitation of Christ by turning to the authors who have struggled with the challenge of following Jesus in their day.

These spiritual giants demonstrate to us the principle that for a pastor to find excellence in the ministry, it is essential to be engaged as both disciple and discipler. Christians of the early twenty-first century are not the finishing point of the Christian faith. We are those who have received the legacy of faith. We are called to hand it on again to new generations. Excellence in pastoring must include personally discipling the next spiritual generation.

Undeniably, pastors nurture as they preach, as they teach, and as they live among the people of their congregations. Beyond that, they need to be involved on a personal basis with a few disciples into whom they can pour their lives. The disciples, in turn, will then become disciplers of others. A pastor, I believe, needs to be totally committed to the mission which Jesus gave the church — to "make disciples of all nations." The role pastors play in the lives of a few others at a personal level is crucial to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

A couple of years ago, the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative in my denomination surveyed over 500 pastors regarding their activity in the making of disciples (defined as one-on-one or one-on-two). It was reported that over 40 per cent of the pastors who responded said they had no discipling relationships with anyone. The demands of the work of the pastorate have so overwhelmed the time of a pastor that she/he has no time left to fulfill the Great Commission on a personal level. In conversations with many pastors, I have heard again and again how much they enjoy being able to lead a key member of their congregation to a deeper level of faith. It is when a pastor seizes that opportunity that a sense of faithfulness to one's calling from God grows. When we as pastors have someone with whom we "do life" as followers of Jesus, we personally shape the next generation of Christ-followers. I believe that such a desire and calling led all those authors to pen those books that I love. Those giants in the faith in previous generations saw the value of committing time to the writing of books that would shape the spiritual walk of all who read them.

Calvin



Elvis

We do not all have to write books. But I believe that discipling happens as we do life with a few people into whom we pour our God-given insights. We can disciple members of our churches and those who are not yet members of our churches. The excellence of all aspects of one's ministry blossom as a pastor personally hands on the faith to a few others.

How do we find those whom we will disciple? Let me share a story of how "God will himself provide" the person with whom you can share life. The time had come for a disciple of mine to literally leave for a far country. I asked him to join me in asking God to provide a new disciple, one who had very little experience in the faith in contrast to this disciple, who was a deeply devout Christian. When we began to pray, God was busy in the life of a young man – a first generation immigrant. He was on an internship in a city some distance from his home, and one evening, instead of heading for the video store to get another movie, he turned into a church parking lot. He saw cars outside, so he thought he would go in to find out what went on in a church.

The Christians welcomed him and brought him to know Jesus. Then it was time for him to return to the university and his living quarters – which were found in the local mosque. He went back to the university not knowing how to go about finding another body of Christians.

A few weeks later, God had arranged a mind-boggling series of events that led him into my life. That fall, I began a discipling relationship with the young Pakistani man that would last for three years. In that time, I would again grow immensely in my love for the Word of God as I walked with someone who read the Scriptures for the first time with eyes of wonder and adoration for God.

The great news is that if you desire to be used of God to lead another person into a deeper relationship with Jesus, God already has the person picked out. We just need to become aware of what God is doing in us and around us. No matter if you are a well-seasoned pastor, young Christian, or someone at any point along the spectrum, anyone who is one step ahead of another can help to show the way in the journey of faith. No one can ever be too busy to do this good work. It is, after all, the heart of the Great Commission from the Great King of the heavens and the earth! May his disciples so increase that we fill the world with the image of Christ himself.

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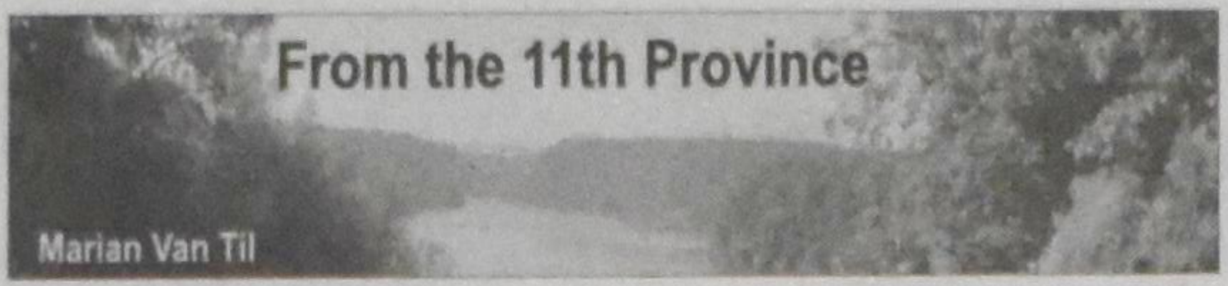

Of historians, Handel and the 'good old days'

If you are among those who, like me, lament much of what is happening in the world of today, you may get told now and then that the world doesn't really get much worse from one generation to the next; it just seems as if it does. Inevitably some number of people in every generation long for "the good old days" – the kind of days that people like us think of as a time when common civilities were truly common, when the urge to escape life through the cheap thrills of drugs and alcohol or casual sex was acted on by only a minute few, when authority of all kinds (beginning with parents) was respected; a time when, as the saying goes, "God was in his heaven and all was right with the world." Our antagonists will say there never really was such a time; the "good old days" never existed.

Those critics are partly right. Not about God being absent, of course, but about each generation judging previous eras as better than their own. Scripture makes clear, after all, that ever since the Fall the unregenerate human heart has been capable of all kinds of evil. There's nothing novel in human beings' denial of God, in people acting as if, and sometimes proclaiming in so many words, "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul" (William Ernest Henley, *Invictus*). There's nothing new in the essential injustices and torments human beings concoct against each other. In Old Testament times God constantly chided his very own people about their scamming each other, their ignoring and even cheating their own orphans and widows. Some aspects of the good old days were decidedly not good.

With each creative act as God was putting the universe together he proclaimed the result "good." On the sixth day, after he had made *us* as the crown of his creation, "God saw all that he had made, and it was *very* good" (my emphasis, Gen. 1:31). But then our first human parents decided that the way God had set things up wasn't quite good enough. The tragic result of their disobedience twisted good beyond recognition, dooming themselves, us and all creation. (But we are here today, and are who we are, because of our *good* God's gracious rescue of us and his creation through Christ.)

Despite ages-old evil, there is truth to the assertion that things are getting worse. Jesus told Nicodemus during the latter's visit in the dark, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:19). The alternative is to embrace Him, Christ the Light. There's no *good* reason not to; says Paul in Romans, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (1:20).

Satan changes with the times

When human beings, ignoring God's power and nature, corrupt themselves repeatedly and want nothing to do with his Light, God finally acquiesces to what they want. They "suppress the truth by their wickedness" – even though "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God made it plain to them" – so God *gives them over to* lust, immorality and degrading behavior because they worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1: 21 ff.). The examples in our time are certainly more blatant than in our own recent generations and even centuries (if not in ancient Rome or biblical Israel).

George Frideric Handel

We have this debate at all because Satan is a wily, insidious adversary. If anybody changes with the times, he does. He is ingenious at devising ways to bait, hook and reel in each new generation. His most effective, permeating strategy in our time is having coerced most of Western civilization to nonchalantly accept the myth that God is just one among many and that his Truth one of many truths. (That was the subject of my column last month.) The supreme irony is that though Satan has convinced so many millions of that, he himself knows it's a lie. "The demons believe in *God* and shudder," the Apostle James told the Christians he was writing to.

From the heart are the issues of life

These issues kept coming to mind during the five years it took me to prepare my biography of the composer George Frideric Handel, just published. I was researching history, and that inevitably causes a person to make mental comparisons between then and now, and between how historians alive now choose to interpret and report the material they study.

In the case of Handel, "then" was the last part of the 17th century and the entire first half of the 18th (d. 1759). He was born in 1685 in Germany to devout Lutheran parents at a time when the *Zeitgeist* of the Reformation was still noticeably present. Both sets of Handel's great-grandparents had picked up their families and possessions to move to a place where they could freely practice their "evangelical faith." Handel himself moved to London when in his mid-20s where there were excellent musical opportunities for him. Contrary to popular notions, he did not leave his faith behind, not then or ever. He spent the rest of his 74 years living in London, widely known and personally admired. Handel's music was frequently referred to as *Sublime*, meaning it was capable of elevating one morally, spiritually and emotionally. It was assumed that a composer could not produce such music if he himself were not living an exemplary life (in modern computer parlance: garbage in, garbage out; good stuff in, good stuff out).

What emerged as I read letters, diaries, sermons and other documents from Handel's England, including the first two music histories written in English, is that the "values" and attitudes infused in these documents, and the picture that I consequently drew of their authors and those authors' times, were quite different than the modern popular view of a secular, skeptical London in the first half of the 18th century, the kind of view you might encounter on the History Channel or in newsweeklies when they go historical. History requires interpretation, of course; "bare" facts aren't bare. I admit I was interpreting; but *how* is the key.

Why was the picture I saw different? I believe it's because most historians writing today are quite removed from Christianity, both as a historic faith and a living faith. So they don't really "get it." When they're writing about historical eras in which Christianity was the major cultural-societal-personal force, they sift it through their own non-Christian filter. If those historians themselves ever experience the true community that members of the Body of Christ know together, if they recognize when they see it the peculiar, wondrous working of God's Spirit in persons and societal movements, if they fundamentally understand how Christians can lay grief, stress, serious illness and their own imminent death in God's hand without fear or even disquiet, they hide it all very well.

Recovering history

Handel lived in the part of the "long 18th century" called the Baroque period, a time in which the spirits of the age were still more attuned to the Reformation than to the Enlightenment. The French writer-philosopher and Deist Voltaire, in commenting on the church and various Christian groups during his three-year stay in England (1726-29), was of the opinion that the Deist thinkers didn't stand a chance of having their ideas take hold in Britain. He asked, rhetorically and sardonically: "Is it not whimsical enough that Luther, Calvin, and Zuinglius, all of them wretched authors, should have founded sects which are now spread over a great part of Europe, that Mahomet, though so ignorant, should have given a religion to Asia and Africa, and that Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Clark, Mr. Locke, Mr. Le Clerc, etc., the greatest philosophers, as well as the ablest writers of their ages, should scarcely have been able to raise a little flock, which even decreases daily?" (from *Letters on the English* [*Lettres Philosophiques*]). Voltaire would have been dismayed to know (perhaps he did know) that the most popular printed material in Britain in Handel's 18th century was sermon collections.

There are many examples of how permeating Christian faith still was in Britain at the time, but I must move on. Th misinterpretations regarding faith that were most nettling to me during my research were those that applied to Handel himself. Though he wasn't much of a letter writer, the personal letters that have survived, the testimony to his faith and "morally blameless" lifestyle by his contemporaries, the testimony of his 18 biblical oratorios and other choral music, and the overall witness of his life (enumerated in the book) are obvious to those who understand the motivations and actions that faith in Christ produces.

During my Handel project I became increasingly disillusioned with the products of modern academia, including a few from Christian institutions. That was only one reason I concluded early on that I should write not for scholars but for music lovers, even if *Messiah* is the only Handel they've ever heard. Secular scholars and their educational institutions are now frequently arguing that being a Christian makes one incapable of unbiased research. But in the Reformed tradition we've long recognized that no scholarship – or any other human activity – is "neutral." That being so, without a fundamental *inside* knowledge of Christian faith, the history of much of Western civilization is incomprehensible. We need to recover that history, for ourselves and for all the world.

Marian Van Til and her husband live in Youngstown, NY. She worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, finishing her CC career as the paper's managing editor. She welcomes reactions to her column and can be contacted at: marianvantil@roadrunner.com or via handel@wordpowerpublishing.com.*

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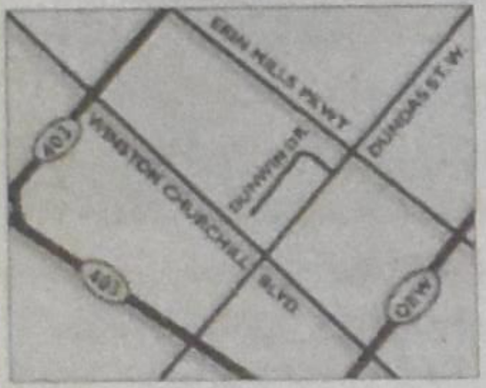

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Correspondence: 25 Logan St
St Catharines ON L2N 2B6
or lowell.witvoet@sympatico.ca
(Best wishes only please)

1957 June 4 2007

We are happy to announce the
50th Wedding Anniversary of our parents:

John and Alida Zantingh (nee **Visscher**)

We pray that God may continue
to bless your marriage, and that your
loving example to all of us continues to shine.

Love from
Jane & Peter Vos
with Dylan, Casey, Dennis and Jonathan
Mike & Tracy Zantingh
with Matthew and Kaylee
Paul & Wendy Zantingh
with Taylor, Bethany and Christopher
Lisa & Ed Bandstra
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Peter & Ashley Zantingh
with Jacob

Look to the Lord and his strength,
Seek his face always. Psalm 105:4

Correspondence: J & A Zantingh
261 Stonechurch Rd E, Hamilton ON L9B 2X3

With joy we give thanks to God for the
50th Wedding Anniversary
of our parents and grandparents.

Herman and Margie Zwiers (nee **Overgaauw**)

on Thursday, June 21, 2007.
We thank God for the many years that
he has blessed your lives together and
pray that he will continue to bless you both.

Much love from your children & grandchildren.

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With thanks to God
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Psalm 90:1

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Abram Niezen

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Classifieds

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What Is The Netherlands Bazaar?

The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" has been in existence for over fifty years. It is a non-denominational organization that works in consultation with the Netherlands Consulate, religious and community leaders, members of the medical community. Children's Aid Societies, and social service organizations. The services of all our workers are on a volunteer basis.

Who Do We Help?

The Netherlands Bazaar is held once everv two years. 100% of the funds raised are used to provide assistance to needy families of Dutch extraction living in Ontario. All of whom have been stricken by illness or other misfortune and need assistance. Thanks to the generosity of the Bazaar supporters, we were able to distribute 900 food parcels over the past two years, 300 children from needy families were given the opportunity to attend summer camp. Without the support of concerned members of the community, this work could not continue.
The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" relies on YOU to inform us when need arises in the community, just as we rely on YOUR participation in our bi-annual Bazaar.

How Can You Help?

Your support could take the form of a financial donation. The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar," as a registered Canadian Charitable Organization, will issue you with an official receipt for income tax purposes.
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Questions?

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Henny DeCloe 416-222-1677
Dia Pos 905-854-5102
Laura Kenny 416-223-7373

Mailing Address:

Committee "Netherlands Bazaar"
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The next Netherlands Bazaar will be held at the **Thornhill** Community Centre Sept. 29th. Details in following issues.

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**June 9, 10
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De acht en dertigste (38)
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HOLLANDSE DAG

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Spreker:
Rev. Job van Hartingsveldt
Topic:
" Wat blijft en wat veranderd"
For Info. call : **613- 546- 5615**

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 9 Brighton Fellowship CRC celebrating re-opening from 2 - 4 pm. More information, p. 21

June 9 Liberation Choir in Concert, 8.00 pm Compass Point Bible Church-Kerns Rd. **Burlington.** A Fundraiser for Drummond House. 200 Voices conducted by Willem Van SuijdamIan Sadler – organist Jennifer McMahon – Soprano SoloistTo order tickets call: Edith Dokter, 905 689 4357 Janetta Howson, 905 319 2662 Henk Guther, 905 319 8336.

June 9, 10 The First Christian Reformed Church of Kemptville 50 year celebration. Banquet on June 9 and worship service on June 10. Contact Harmen Boersma (613-258-5565).

June 10 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3: 00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

June 10 Contemporary Christian Music Concert, 7:00 pm, Grace Christian Reformed Church, 25 Channel Nine Court, Scarborough (just off McCowan Rd, a half block north of the 401, beside the CTV building), featuring the *Stonesthrow Band* with opening band *Channel 121*. Suggested donation of $5 and/or a food donation for a local food bank.

June 13 Hollandse Dag 10 a.m. at the **Moorefield** Community Centre. Details in May 14th issue or phone Hilbert Rumph at 1-519-638-2053.

June 13 Hollandse Dag 10 am at First Christian Reformed Church, 310 Kingscourt ave. **Kingston**. Spreker: Rev. Job van Hartingsveldt. Topic: " Wat blijft en wat veranderd" For Info.: 613- 546- 5615

June 15, 16. GATEWAY VIETNAM MISSION CONFERENCE at the ALL NATIONS MISSION CENTRE in Fort Erie, Ontario. For more info contact: Christian Aid - 800-871-0882 or visit www.christianaid.ca/events.php

June 24 CRC of **Richmond**, BC will celebrate its 50th anniversary and closing. Please see ad this page for details.

Sep 29 Netherlands Bazaar, **Thornhill** Community Centre. Details in following issues.

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50TH ANNIVERSARY AND CLOSING

The council of the Christian Reformed Church of **Richmond, British Columbia**, announces that our congregation will celebrate our 50th anniversary at a special service at 10:00 am on the **24th** of **June 2007** in which we will be giving thanks to the Lord for his faithfulness to our community. This will also be our final service as congregation. As we close our doors with sadness, we gratefully hand over the keys to the Tapestry, a CRC church plant. They will continue to worship and minister in Richmond out of our present address.

We invite all members, former members and friends to join us in this service as we focus on what the Lord has done among us over the last 50 years.

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News

Former weed may fill world's fuel tanks

Mark Sappenfield

JAGDALPUR, INDIA – In an overgrown corner of Moolchand Sethia's plantation, runty and unloved, stands what could be the next revolution in the world's search for renewable fuel.

From China to Brazil, countries have begun setting aside tens of thousands of acres for the cultivation of jatropha – a plant many experts say is the most promising source for biodiesel. At the same time, companies from Europe and India have begun buying up land throughout Africa to establish jatropha plantations.

As American farmers plan to plant the most corn since World War II to cash in on ethanol, which is added to gasoline, much of the rest of the world is turning to jatropha, which is used as a substitute for diesel fuel.

The two are not competitors, since neither can be used in the other type of fuel. But jatropha is fast emerging as a candidate for the ideal biofuel. It is grown in wastelands, needs relatively little care or refinement, and is inedible – meaning it will not take food from the poor for the gas tanks of the rich.

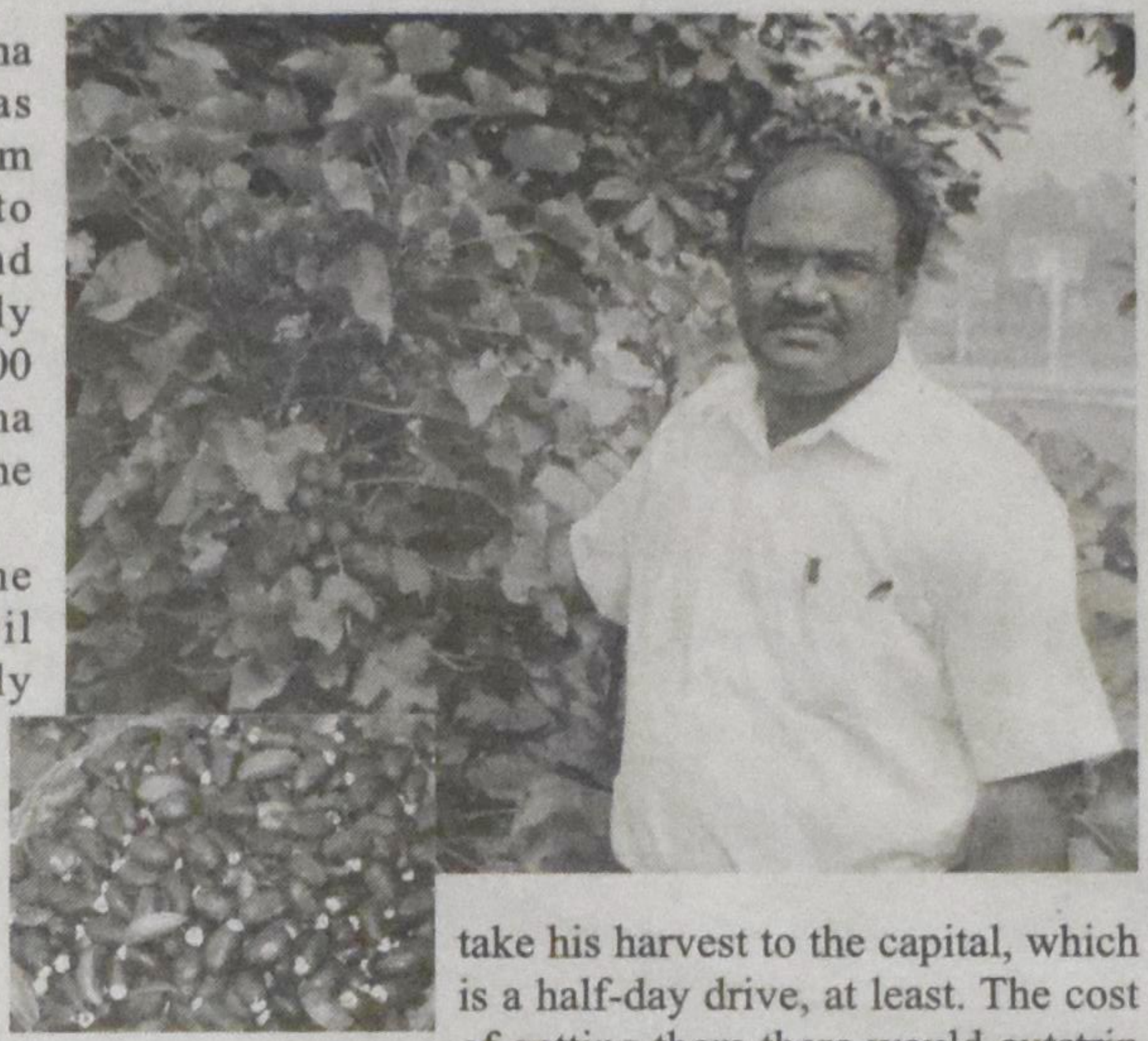
But Mr. Sethia's modest plantation is a reminder that jatropha has a long way to go. Although Sethia's home state of Chhattisgarh has been one of India's leading jatropha promoters, industries say it could be years before they begin production here. Until then, Sethia laments, the $1,500 he has invested in jatropha has been wasted.

Globally, experts worry that the story could be similar. Lured by jatropha's potential, nations and corporations have acted rashly, coming to the "idea that it is the final answer for many problems," says Kees Daey Ouwens of Fuels from Agriculture in Communal Technology (FACT) in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

It could be. But it is too early to tell. "Jatropha is very promising," he says. "But there is not enough information … to start on such large scales."

There is no estimate as to how much jatropha is being cultivated globally, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the trend is accelerating:

- The government-owned China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) is planning to have 80,000 acres of jatropha in Sichuan Province alone by 2010.
- Renova Biodiesel of Brazil is expected to plant 60,000 acres of jatropha, and reports suggest that other oil companies are considering planting nearly 500,000 acres in the next four years.
- D1 Oils, a British company that is considered by many to be the leader in jatropha cultivation, has plantations from Swaziland to Indonesia, and hopes to nearly double its 385,000 acres of jatropha worldwide by the end of 2008.
- The Philippine National Oil Co. Recently earmarked $14 million for jatropha planting and production, while Indonesia plans to set up 52 biodiesel plants across the country at a cost of $7.3 million.



The cause of the excitement is both environmental and economic. The European Union has mandated that by 2020 all cars must run on 20 percent biodiesel, which burns cleaner than fossil fuels. A 1998 study, jointly sponsored by the US Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture, concluded that biodiesel reduces net carbon_dioxide emissions by 78 percent compared with petroleum diesel.

Meanwhile, Asian economies are desperately seeking natural resources to support their growth. India, for example, imports 70 percent of its fuel, and its planning commission has prioritized the study of domestically grown biofuels in an attempt to become more self-sufficient.

Jatropha is a natural answer. The leafy bush thrives in arid regions around the equator, has no use as food, and takes little refinement: a hydraulic press to squeeze the oil from the seeds, and a chemical solution to create and filter the fuel. When the necessary infrastructure is in place – sufficient farms, transport routes, and processing plants – jatropha oil could be no more expensive than regular diesel.

"In 10 years, the production prices will not be much different," says Mr. Daey Ouwens.

Along with several other states, Chhattisgarh has responded with massive planting campaigns and incentives for farmers, including 500 free saplings. Sethia received a $250 loan for planting jatropha, as well as a commendation from the state. The problem is, there's no market here in the Indian outback.

The state says it will buy the seeds, which then must be crushed to create the oil. But Sethia says he would need to take his harvest to the capital, which is a half-day drive, at least. The cost of getting them there would outstrip any possible profit.

Then there's the fact that jatropha needs more care than he had anticipated. He has let most of his crop fend for itself. After two years, the plants are knobby fingers less than a foot tall. A few plants, however, he planted in a ruddy dirt embankment near a seasonal pond and tended regularly. Their leafy branches arch higher than Sethia himself and are already yielding seeds.

Right now, he says, the economics don't work. "But if there is a [processing] plant nearby, farmers will grow it, because there is the assurance that they will be able to sell it," he says. As it is, he knows of only one other person in the district growing jatropha.

For their part, oil industries are interested in building processing plants. But it will be several years before there is a critical mass in Chhattisgarh – about 50,000 acres – to justify the costs. "That has to come up," says B. B. Choudhary of Indian Oil. "It has not yet."

Yet there is also a danger in industries pushing too fast, experts say. Jatropha cultivation is so new that scientists know little about it, such as ideal conditions for growth, susceptibility to disease, or expected yields per acre. Some critics even suggest that toxic strains of the plant can cause health problems for workers.

The Energy and Resources Institute in Delhi has set up plantations across India to study these issues for British Petroleum. In four years, all these knowledge gaps will be filled in, argues Alok Adholeya, who manages the program.

He advises farmers like Sethia to remain patient: "If they are patient enough, they will find some buyers very soon, because the message is getting out."

News Digest

Diaper alternative?

For eco-friendly parents who have switched all their incandescent bulbs for flourescents and who have traded in their 4WD Jeep for a hybrid Prius, there is now an alternative to diapers. Diapers, we all know, are a threat to the environment, especially the disposable kind. Millions of tons of them go into landfills every year because every baby fill about 8,000 of them before he or she is potty trained.

The alternative? Back to the cloth diaper? No, that was also polluting. The latest eco-friendly way of bringing up baby is diaperless. Yes, that's right. Mommy and daddy keep an eye on baby, and when they see him scrunch up and get a red face, they grab the nearest container – a coffee cup or an empty vase – and try to catch it before it hits the floor.

Then it gets flushed down the toilet. No dirty diapers to wash or dump in a landfill. Just a coffee cup to rinse.

There must be other side benefits. Mommy and daddy must burn a lot of calories chasing baby around the house. They might want to wear protective clothing to prevent rug burns on their knees.

Trees revisited

Not too long ago we reported on a study that calculated that in the northern climes trees contribute to heating the planet. Now trees are being vaunted as a way to help keep us cool.

"We discovered that a modest increase of 10 percent green space reduced surface temperatures in the urban environment by 40 degrees, which would overcome temperature rises caused by global warming over the next 75 years, effectively 'climate proofing' our cities." said the head of the research project.

Some of us who live near trees or who go for walks in the woods have long suspected that it's cooler in the woods – at least in summer. I'd be hugely in favor of leveling a few blocks of ugly buildings here and there and planting the area in trees, if it weren't for the prospect of my house perhaps getting leveled.

But trees are good air conditioners. I bet if some of us wrote a letter to the Harper government, planting a tree might be added to Canada's program to combat climate change.

Plant a tree and change your light bulbs – and chase your baby with your coffee cup.

Eco-friendly ways

Another way to combat global warming is to eat less meat, suggests Al Gore. No, it's not because vegetarians are cool. Eating animal protein, several groups are saying, is very inefficient, and in the area of energy efficiency is fast becoming the standard. If you can link your cause, whether it's vegetarianism or women's rights, to global warming, you have an ace in the hole.

While some want to cut down on the number of animals inhabiting the planet with us (or at least the number of cows and pigs), others would prefer to cut down on the number of human beings. Britain's Optimum Population Trust has declared that in the face of climate change it is irresponsible for anyone to have more than one child.

Well, the eco-friendly way of raising babies (above) might help on that score. After chasing around one toddler with a coffee cup for several months, parents will be too exhausted to have more than one child.